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RELIGIOUS THOUGHT
IN THE
GREATER AMERICAN POETS

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BY

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etc.

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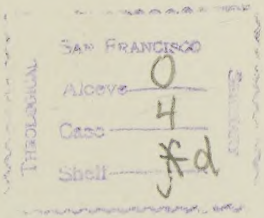
"As certain even of your own poets have said"—*Saint Paul*



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BOSTON CHICAGO
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TO

Ruth and Philip Houston

"Friendship is a sheltering tree."

Coleridge: *Youth and Age.*

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RELIGIOUS THOUGHT
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GREATER AMERICAN POETS

Religious Thought in the Greater American Poets

I

THE POINT OF VIEW

Religion may be defined as adjustment of life to spiritual ideals. This definition, it must be acknowledged, is not adequate to all purposes and occasions. From some points of view, it is too broad; from others, not sufficiently specific; from still others, too narrow. One person will object that by it religion is taken to mean no more than mere conduct; another will point out that it identifies religion with ethics; a third will insist that since it makes no distinction between true and false religion, it leads no whither; and a fourth may go so far as to reject it on the ground, that the use of the term spiritual in the definition is little other than sentimental. Of the last two critics, the former will almost certainly hold that any religion worthy of the name must demand the acceptance of the Christian ideal; and the latter will perhaps assert that sentimentalism in religion will seldom stop much short of superstition. A number of other objections might also be brought forward; yet in face of all, the definition of religion as an adjustment of life to spiritual ideals, may be allowed to stand as a point of departure in the quest of discovering to what extent religious thought is an important element in American poetry.

The contention, valid or invalid, that true religion is necessarily Christian has no unimportant bearing upon the present investigation. The subject matter under examination having originated in the heart and brain of one or another of the eight poets whom America — at least nominally a Christian nation — most delights to honor, is properly studied from a Christian point of view. True, we are brought into contact with the religion of India and that of certain ancient Greeks when we approach Emerson; find ourselves skirting Islam when we turn to Poe; and catch echoes of Confucianism, of the Mosaic law, and of the slender belief of the North American Indian when we read Whittier, Longfellow, and the rest. Still, the admixture of religions other than Christian is, on the whole, but slight in our authors, and whenever assimilated, has almost certainly been Christianized in the process. In other words, however eclectic American poets may appear to have been in their religious thought, they seem not at any time to have departed very far from fundamental Christian doctrines, certainly never to have lost sight of them. It is impossible, of course, to maintain that upon even one tenet of Christian faith were the poets of America in full agreement. Indeed, not one of them was completely orthodox in the exact meaning of that word. Yet that they were in accord neither with one another nor with certain widely accepted principles is of little importance here; for our poets are not being tried upon the charge of heresy. The main point of

interest with which we are concerned is, that they passed in review this religious thought and that; and, in recording their several interpretations, made clear what Christianity in particular, and perhaps all religion in general, meant to each of them.

It may be asked, however, why turn to the poets? Why, if one's interest is anything more than academic, if one is seriously looking for a real message, a substantial defense of faith, — why not go directly to the theologians or at least to clergymen who, it ought not to be too much to assume, have made a study of religion in its formal, its scientific aspect, and have thus fulfilled the injunction of Saint Peter that they should be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh for a reason of the hope that is within them? Surely such men, it might be argued, are able to speak upon matters of faith with something like a nearer approach to finality than can any group of writers whose preachments — beautiful in form though they may be — are at best but *obiter dicta*. To this assertion, it may be opposed that there is certainly no little gain in resorting to poetry; and if it then be further objected " but not so great a gain," the reply may be advanced " yet at all events a different gain." All science, whether it be physical, mental, or spiritual, whether it be chemistry, psychology, or eschatology, makes its appeal primarily by way of the intellect. Yet the intellect is by no means the only channel through which our complex natures receive wisdom and power. The feelings also are capable of transmitting impressions and impulses

which are living forces, forces which often arouse us to greater activities, to firmer convictions than do energies elsewhere derived. Now poetry and religion, in contrast with science and theology, address themselves mainly to the sensibilities. Thus it comes about that many a man who has lost his soul by the intellect, has regained it by the feelings; who has sacrificed it upon the altars of science and theology, has received it a second time from the hands of religion and poetry. Such a man, as no other, realizes to the full a certain spiritual experience which has been recorded by Tennyson in his *In Memoriam*, —

> " If e'er when faith had fallen asleep,
> I heard a voice, ' Believe no more,'
> And heard an ever-breaking shore
> That tumbled in the Godless deep;
>
> " A warmth within the breast would melt
> The freezing reason's colder part;
> And like a man in wrath the heart
> Stood up and answer'd, ' I have felt.' "

Mr. Frederick Prescott recently remarked in his *Poetry and Dreams* that the poet and the dreamer are somehow alike in their faculty of vision. " This relation," he went on to say, " is indicated by the uses of language which, spontaneously expressing the sense of mankind, often reveal psychological truth not otherwise readily discovered." Had Mr. Prescott's point of view been other than it was, he might also have shown, as indeed Longfellow in *Prometheus* once showed,

that the poet and the prophet — the Hebrew prophet if one will — have much in common. It is the popular, but wholly mistaken idea that Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Amos, to mention no others, looked only towards the future. As a matter of fact, more frequently than not they found their mission in laying their fingers upon ailing spots in their own generation and in crying out with no delay, so sure were they of the validity of their message, " Thus saith the Lord! " Impassioned as their addresses were, however, there were but few among their hearers, if we believe the records, who did not shrug their shoulders and exclaim, " Dreamers! " Without attempting to define, much less to call into question or to deny the special inspiration ascribed by both religion and theology to the prophets of Israel and Judah, one feels safe in maintaining that many poets of a later time have spoken with much the same insight and power, only to meet with similar indifference and scorn. The contemptuous incredulity with which the children of Israel listened to those who accused the kingdom of evil and sought to purge it of its wickedness, was not essentially different from that which Dante encountered when assailing the city of Florence, he pointed out its short-comings, nor from that which Milton underwent when he as fearlessly lifted his voice against the excesses of the Commonwealth as he had against those of the Monarchy.

America, it is true, has produced neither a Dante nor a Milton. Whatever her errors, she as yet has

had no need to castigate her leaders as Browning tells us Dante found necessary,

> " When, his left hand i' the hair o' the wicked,
> Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
> Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
> Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle,
> Let the wretch go festering through Florence."

Neither has she had much, if any need to hear a Milton urge her to " fly the Babylonian woe," or tell her that " in vain doth Valour bleed while Avarice and Rapine share the land," or bid her generals

> " Help us to save free conscience from the paw
> Of hireling wolves whose gospel is their maw."

Nevertheless, our country has at no time lacked poets who, even in the face of coldness and contempt, have been ready to respond to the call of duty, eager to speak to the purpose in words of fire. Whittier pleaded with America to repent her of the evils which she had committed in earlier days, and denounced her for permitting slavery to remain in the land; Lowell's tone was by no means apologetic in *The Present Crisis;* and Whitman's message to a later time was quite as sturdy. The point here made, however, is not, that these poets spoke with sincerity, but with inspiration; not that they gave voice to their own feelings alone, but that they felt themselves pressed on by some force arising elsewhere than within. In other words, they too could say, not infrequently, like Hosea, the son of Beeri, " Then said the Lord

unto me." Surely, whatever our understanding of the theological concept of inspiration may be, it is not too much to hold that the poet like the prophet, is sometimes the mouthpiece of a power and insight higher than human. He is often, it is true, but an imitator, a maker as Aristotle would have him — a poet, that is, in the strict sense; he is often no more than a finder, as he was held to be in the Middle Ages — a troubadour, a *trouvère;* but as in the past he was often something beyond a mere maker, a mere finder, so is he still, now and then, much more,—he is a seer. Not only is he dowered, as Tennyson says, with "the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love"; he has greater gifts,

> "He sees thro' life and death, thro' good and ill,
> He sees thro' his own soul. —
> The marvel of the everlasting will,
> An open scroll,
> Before him lies."

It is the possession of this insight by the poet, which makes profitable the study of his attitude towards religion. Indeed, to many who have real interest in that subject, the poet's utterances are often far more illuminating, far more stimulating, far more helpful, far more convincing than anything that the theologian has to say. Matthew Arnold's remark that religion is "the voice of the deepest human experience" seems empty to some men; but he who has truly experienced religion knows what the English critic meant, though that meaning defies statement in any other words than

Arnold's own. Such a man cannot doubt that there is something beyond the comprehension of the intellect, something with which he has mystical communion, something of which he has an unspeakable understanding. The psychologist and the theologian may respectively explain this experience to him on a materialistic or a spiritual basis, but he gains little from them. He may be able to attain their point of view, to accept their conclusions indeed; but he is likely to feel, perhaps to insist, that they have left something out of account, left something hovering obscurely in the background. He therefore turns elsewhere for answers to his inquiries and finds, — not answers, it is true, but quieting assurances in the utterances of the psalmist and the prophet, in the words that fell from the lips of Jesus, and in the expressions of confident belief of those who sometimes speak with the tongues of men and of angels — the poets. Thus entering into the way of peace, he finds that he may again resort to prayer, may again walk day by day with the Great Companion, may again become as a little child and enter into the Kingdom, saved, not by the intellect, but by the feelings; not by knowledge, but by faith; not by argument, but by intuition; not by theology, but by religion; not by science, but by poetry.

The poets of America especially are helpful to the man who is distraught by the restlessness, scepticism, and infidelity of a materialistic age. No other group of singers, it is safe to say, was ever in any country in the same length of time so

deeply religious in thought, so uniformly reverent in feeling and tone. The greater American poets of the nineteenth century passed in review all the important doctrines of Christianity and made their conclusions a vital and inseparable element of their writings. Escaping, too, the Scylla and Charybdis of repellent dogmatism on one hand and apologetic defense on the other, they were almost always capable, even when giving voice to their strongest convictions, of keeping within the bounds of poetic expression. It is in such success that their great value as religious teachers lies. If literature is the expression of man's permanent relations to the conditions of his existence, as one writer has said; if poetry is a criticism of life, as another maintains; if religion really is adjustment of life to spiritual ideals, then are the American poets safe leaders through the valleys of scepticism and unbelief. Ever sincere, devout, and reverent, they spoke with an inspiration that puts an end to doubt, and lays the foundations of certainty. Those who have learned the secret of listening to the poets, have no hesitation in taking at face-value the thought of Longfellow, that in the mind of the poet is "truth from falsehood cleansed and sifted"; the belief of Whittier, that oftentimes through him and his brother-singers "the message of a truth divine, the call of God is given"; and the assurance of Lowell, that it is the poets,

> "Who utter wisdom from the central deep,
> And, listening to the inner flow of things,
> Speak to the age out of eternity."

II

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

Critics have spent not a little time and labor in verifying the tradition that the verses of William Cullen Bryant's boyhood were written under the immediate influence of Pope. Others take delight in pointing out that *Thanatopsis* was the direct outcome of an interest in the poems of White, Blair, and Southey. It is moreover a commonplace, open to question though it be, to speak of Bryant as the American Wordsworth. Interesting no doubt these investigations and assertions are, yet they offer little assistance to the reader who approaches Bryant with the purpose of discovering how far that poet has recorded his religious faith in his poems. To succeed in that quest, one does not go to England, he remains at home — in Massachusetts in fact, — for Bryant in his religious belief was clearly of Puritan heritage. On his father's side he traced his ancestry to a certain Stephen Bryant who was dwelling in Plymouth as early as 1632; on his mother's, to that John Alden of historic fame, who with many others in 1620 sought the shores of New England as affording a place for freedom in the worship of God.

The parents to whom William Cullen Bryant was born plainly showed the impress of their ancestors, so conducting themselves from day to day,

indeed, that the atmosphere of their cultured home, although kindly, was uniformly severe and restrained. In a diary which Mrs. Bryant kept for fifty-three years without neglecting for a single day to make an entry, she wrote on November 3, 1794, "Storming, wind N. E.; churned; seven in the evening, son born." It is hardly surprising that the child thus ushered into the world proved frail; yet to insure its health and longevity, the father, a physician of much local repute, had the boy plunged every morning into a spring of cold water. This heroic treatment actually served its purpose; the child grew and waxed strong, increasing daily in stature and wisdom.

The religious atmosphere of the Bryant home was quite as severe as the domestic. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the poet was a boy, the minister of the town, it may be remembered, was a man of much importance, "his mere bodily presence," as someone has said, "often inspiring awe and sometimes even depression." Now it happens to be recorded that the home of Dr. Peter Bryant was frequented by the clergymen of Cummington and the neighboring towns, and by many other men whose moral ideas were of the strictest type, and whose religious orthodoxy could not have awakened even passing suspicion. From infancy, therefore, Dr. Bryant's son was closely surrounded by marked religious influences. Quite naturally, as a result, he was early made acquainted with the Bible as the chief textbook of the Christian religion. Something of the nature and extent

of that acquaintance may be read in *A Lifetime*, an autobiographical poem written by Bryant in his eighty-second year; and certainly no one would deny that something also of the impression which it made upon him was reflected in much that he wrote and did throughout the many fruitful years of his active life. Though religion with him was never a passion, as it may be said to have been with Whittier; though it never became the mysticism that it surely was with Emerson, it never failed throughout his life to be to him a strong, informing power. If his faith seems to have been at times no more than an uncomplaining acceptance of his lot, prayer was always to him a source of comfort and help. If the rite of baptism was not performed for him until he had passed well on towards the age of three score years and ten, he was, none the less, a constant attendant at the services of his church. For him, indeed, as for the hero of his *Tale of Cloudland*, the simple reverence which was taught him in childhood, kept an unrelaxing hold upon his heart.

Looking back to the man himself, the reader of the present day seldom pictures Bryant as other than dignified and reserved — cold perhaps. Despite his still remembered reputation for kindness, courtesy, and consideration of others, he seems to have stood aloof from his fellowmen. Said one who knew him well, "Refined in taste, clear in mind, sober in judgment, he walked among us like a Greek philosopher returned to earth." Of such a man, the religion, inevitably partaking of the

nature of his character, would be calm, lofty, and noble. Inheriting the faith of his progenitors, Bryant, it has already been said, held it firmly to his death. Yet we are not to think of him as merely accepting a tradition; rather, he seems to have heeded the injunction of the Apostle to prove all things, to hold fast that which is good. He looked out across Nature and gazed back through History; he observed his fellowmen and studied his own heart, discovering in one or another a corroboration sufficient for him of the faith once delivered unto the saints. Emptying himself of every predisposition to a desired conclusion, he saw that the present, the past, and the future constitute a procession, a panorama, a pageant. Where others might perceive no more than a meaningless, kaleidoscopic change, he discovered, as at the same time and in the same manner the English Tennyson was discovering,

> " Thro' the ages one increasing purpose runs,
> And the thoughts of men are widen'd with the process of the suns."

On the value of the evidence which Bryant found within himself he was far from unmindful. To him, as to nearly every man, the final, the most convincing witness is the affirmation of the soul. He knew that beyond the evidence of the senses, beneath the conclusions of the intellect are certainties founded upon the feelings, which are mightier than those sweeping outward from any other sources. Trusting himself to the strength of

these tides, Bryant permitted himself to be borne to ports other than those to which reason alone could carry him. Clearly, he knew the power of what may not inaptly be called the Higher Conviction, that spiritual experience which for him found expression in *The Conjunction of Jupiter and Venus:* —

> " I would not always reason. The straight path
> Wearies us with the never-varying lines,
> And we grow melancholy. I would make
> Reason my guide, but she should sometimes sit
> Patiently by the way-side, while I traced
> The mazes of the pleasant wilderness
> Around me. She should be my counsellor,
> But not my tyrant. For the spirit needs
> Impulses from a deeper source than hers;
> And there are motions, in the mind of man,
> That she must look upon with awe."

Trustful of his own heart Bryant certainly was, yet he also found help and inspiration in Nature. She never failed to afford him a place of refuge from the world. When he wished " to steal an hour from study and care," he made his way to Green River; when the ills of life " chafed the spirit — when the unsteady pulse beat with strange flutterings," — he sought the quiet of the woods. Like Wordsworth who learned beside the river Wye that " Nature never did betray the heart that loved her," Bryant held " communion with her visible forms " and heard her speak " a various language." Earth and sky had each its message for his listening ear. Seed-time and harvest, vernal shower and

winter snow, to him as to the speaker in *The Old Man's Counsel,*

> "Each brought, in turn,
> Some truth, some lesson on the life of man,
> Or recognition of the Eternal Mind
> Who veils his glory with the elements."

The waterfowl pursuing its solitary way "along the pathless coast — the desert and illimitable air," was earnest of the Power who guides the steps of men aright; the fringed gentian, sturdily uplifting its blossoms after "the keen and frosty night," gave strength to the hope that in the hour of death we do not wholly die; the undulating prairies were the work of "the Hand that built the firmament"; the sea was mighty, "but a mightier swayed its restless billows"; the ancient Apennines "wearing the glory of a brighter world, proclaimed the essential Goodness, strong and wise." The glorious works of God — turn where the poet would, — one perfect lesson taught,

> "Eternal Love doth keep
> In His complacent arms, the earth, the air, the deep."

So closely indeed did Bryant press to Nature's heart, so clearly did he understand her voice that at times he became almost pagan in expression, if not in thought. Listening, he heard earth, like her offspring man, bewail her "childhood's unreturning hours," and uplift to Heaven a general cry for guilt and wrong and infamy and shame. Questioning the trees of the forest, he came at last to believe that in their green veins there dwelt

a " sense of pleasure and of pain." Not always, indeed, did he give way to this mood. More often he was unwilling to go further than to look upon the groves as " God's first temples " — ancient sanctuaries more befitting the rites of prayer and praise than are " the roofs that our frail hands have raised." Yet when he sought to lift the acceptable hymn within the shadow of an ancient wood and hold communion with his Maker there, the spirit of the Psalmist sometimes came upon him, and he dared say, as in *Our Fellow Worshippers*, that the works of Nature uttered their thanksgivings too.

Much, however, as Bryant loved Nature, he could not, any more than Wordsworth, be unresponsive to the lessons taught by the ebb and flow of human life. As the English poet, too often prone to call the city dissolute, obstreperous, cruel, or mean, could yet exclaim, when he looked at dawn upon the beauty and the majesty of London, that never before had he seen a sight so touching, or felt a calm so deep; so Bryant, ready as he was to assert that the world of man is full of guilt and misery, crime and shame, could yet admit, that when the hour of rest hushes the voices and the footsteps, the quiet of the moment breathes of Him who bends above " the vast and helpless city while it sleeps." Never indeed did Bryant utter words more convincing or more sincere than these which stand at the beginning of his *Hymn of the City*.

" Not in the solitude
Alone may man commune with Heaven, or see,
Only in savage wood
And sunny vale, the present Deity;
Or only hear his voice
Where the winds whisper and the waves rejoice.
Even here do I behold
Thy steps, Almighty — here, amidst the crowd
Through the great city rolled,
With everlasting murmur deep and loud."

Nor was this mood one caught only by chance, or one quickly passing. Bryant wrote his *Hymn of the City* in 1830; he returned nearly a decade and a half later to the same theme in *The Crowded Street.* In the latter poem he recorded his thoughts as he watched the ever-shifting train of men and women called hither and thither by their various interests. Heedless of one another, each, he admitted, was bent upon his own task, his own pleasure; yet the poet's keen eye not the less saw the bond which made them one. " There is," he knew,

" There is who heeds, who holds them all,
In His large love and boundless thought. —
These struggling tides of life that seem
In wayward, aimless course to tend,
Are eddies of the mighty stream
That rolls to its appointed end."

Bryant, however, was far from content to observe no more of human life than that which surged about him. He also looked back upon the panorama of the past and forward to the procession of the future. In *Thanatopsis,* although he invites us to a com-

munion with Nature, he really summons us to a thoughtful contemplation of that steady movement of mankind towards the grave, which has already swallowed up "the patriarchs of the infant world, the powerful of the earth, the wise, the good, the kings, the seers of ages past, all in one mighty sepulchre." In *The Prairies* he reflects, that as on those western plains the Red Man succeeded the Mound Builders, and the White Man the Indian, so our present civilization may not impossibly decline before another yet unborn. In *The Ages*, he surveys the advances already made in knowledge, virtue, and happiness, and finds no little support for his hope that love and peace shall steadily increase until at last they make their paradise with man. In *The Flood of Years*, he again looks back upon the past and speaks of history as a wild, rushing torrent of which the foremost waves and those alone bear life. That sullen stream has borne down the just and the unjust, the young and the old; that sea-like flood has sapped the foundations of temples and palaces, fortresses and towers; that restless ocean welters over memorial stones whence the inscriptions have been worn away, over thrones of mighty kings, and over shattered altars of long forgotten gods. But the poet is not content, as he was in *Thanatopsis*, to contemplate death as the end of all, or as he was in *The Ages*, to hope for no more than the advancement of the human race. If he cannot look beyond the barrier which separates the Life that is, from the Life that is to come, he will at least take comfort

from what the wise and good have said, he will believe that beyond the belt of darkness, the flood still rolls on, gathering up and bearing gently forward all that has been truly noble, great, or lovely.

These, then, are the main sources of Bryant's religious belief: the Bible, the teachings of which were impressed upon his mind from early childhood; the promptings of his own soul, to which he often listened as to the voice of authority; Nature, whom again and again he found to be a very present help in trouble; and History, which he looked upon, now as completed and monumental in the past, now as being made by those whom the poet met day after day, and now as dimly foreshadowed in the future. These four sources determined, we may turn quite properly to inquire, what were the tenets of the faith which Bryant drew from them? What, in other words, was the personal significance to him, of the terms, God, Christ, Life, Death, and Immortality?

Taking up these words in order, we may safely assert that God, in the poetry of Bryant, is never less than a mighty force in Nature, — better, perhaps, a mighty Force transcending Nature. The poet thinks of Him as "the architect of the universe": the heavens are the works of His fingers; the moon and the stars are of His ordaining; He moulded in His hand the globe; He filled the chambers of the sky with "the ever flowing air"; the sea is His, He made it, and His hand prepared the dry land. And amid these glorious works of His, God Himself is ever present.

He fills the solitude. He is " in the soft wind that runs along the summit of the trees "; He is in the thunderbolt, the volcano, and the earthquake. He is everywhere immanent; He is at work now, even as He was at work in the earliest days of creation. Nor with Bryant does the conception of the Supreme Being end here, as it does with many men. If it did, God might justly be looked upon as no more to the poet than a term for that force which the physicist asserts is inherent in matter and which must therefore inevitably end with matter; — as no more than a personification of that vast energy which, somewhat grudgingly, the scientist has to admit he has never wholly measured, and the inventor to acknowledge he can hardly hope ever completely to harness. Now Bryant is a poet; he is not a scientist; neither, in the ordinary sense of the word, is he an inventor. And because he is a poet, he believes that his vision is sure. To him, God is no mere blind force upbuilding only to unbuild; no unreasoning power, careless whether it creates or whether it destroys; no mighty energy acting unknowingly, yet necessarily in accordance with laws which in their entirety shall sooner or later be formulated by the mind of man. Beyond a doubt, God, to Bryant, is far more than any of these things: He is " the Soul of this great universe," He is indwelling Life, He preserves all things in harmony, guiding the uttermost stars in their courses and watching with infinite care the sparrow's flight.

And He without whose care not a single sparrow

falleth, bends, the poet more than once asserts, in special love above the race which He has stamped with His own image. A Power who pities man, He numbers every secret tear, His hand touches the wounded heart and it is healed. He guides the feet of those who trust Him; He watches over the fate of nations. Though for a time He sends His rain upon the just and the unjust, He marks the bounds of guilty powers; though for a time the wicked tread their brethren down and feel no awe of Him who will avenge them, He, long-suffering, hears the cry of the oppressed, and in His own appointed time sets the captive free. Bryant's conception of God is indeed that of the Apostle: in Him we live and move and have our being; after Him we may feel and surely find Him, for He is not far from any one of us, and we are, beyond a doubt, His offspring. Unfaltering in his trust, Bryant was confident that the time must come when men shall see that Might and Right move hand in hand. Truth at times may be crushed to earth; but none the less the eternal years of God are hers: she yet shall rise in triumph over error wounded, writhing, dying. There yet shall be, he points out in *Among the Trees*, a nobler age than ours, an age when in the eternal strife between good and evil, God shall be seen God, ruling as unconquerable Law.

Of the Holy Spirit — the Comforter, that is the Strengthener — whose work it is to turn the hearts of men to find the better way, Bryant makes mention certainly at least once, and quite as certainly

not above twice. It may therefore be concluded that the doctrine of the Third Person of the Trinity was one into which Bryant did not care to enter. Be that as it may, he found the doctrine of the Christ of great interest. Perhaps, it may not unjustly be said that in the poet's mind, the Holy Spirit was as vaguely defined, and the Christ quite as clearly defined as they are to the majority of those who profess and call themselves Christians. If on one hand he barely mentioned the work and personality of the Holy Ghost, on the other he pictured Christ as Jesus, the son of Mary, whose blessed feet well knew the fields of Galilee; and as the only begotten Son of God, who being lifted up, won for man the boon of eternal life.

Of the great doctrine of Christ as the Word, the Word that was with God, the Word that was God, no traces exist in the poetry of Bryant. The belief that Christ was pre-existent to His incarnation as the Nazarene, seems not at any time to have been in the poet's mind. But of those thirty-three wondrous years when God made His culminating manifestation of Himself in being very man, Bryant did not hesitate to accept the four great records which, though beaten upon by vicious ridicule and undermined by destructive criticism, still stand unshaken. To Bryant, we may gather from his numerous *Hymns*, the lustre of the star did indeed lead the kings of the East to Bethlehem; the blessed Virgin bent above the manger wherein lay her Holy Child, and later treasured in her heart the strange prophetic sayings of His ripening

youth. At His word Cana's water changed to wine, the blind received their sight, and the dead arose to life. In Christ the poet saw the Great Exemplar, saw Him drawing all men unto Himself, saw Him rising from the tomb, saw Him ascending into Heaven, saw Him as One upon whose Body we in our hearts may truly feed by faith, and of whose Blood we may as surely drink, in remembrance of that hour when He made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. Manifestly, too, we may conclude from *The Song of the Sower*, Bryant looked upon the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as the crowning service of the Church. Far more to him than a mere, ordinary memorial was the consecrated bread of the communion table. That mystic loaf, he saw, did in some true way unite the believer to the risen Lord.

It is perhaps not too much to assert that it was Bryant's contemplation of the life of Christ which ultimately led him to confident belief in the immortality of the soul. Certainly that belief, if not indeed absent from the thought of his early years, was at that time no more than latent. Urgent as Nature was in her summons to him, she seemed at times to speak the chilling words, death ends all. Nor was History much more comforting: she held out but one promise, we live through our influence for good. Often as the concluding lines of *Thanatopsis* are quoted to bring comfort in the hour of death, they really contain nothing but an exhortation that we conduct ourselves not less worthily

than the great dead, with whom we shall inevitably be associated in the grave. "So live," the poet writes,

> "So live, that when thy summons comes to join
> The innumerable caravan, which moves
> To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
> His chamber in the silent halls of death,
> Thou go not, like the quarry slave at night,
> Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
> By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,
> Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
> About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

In these lines Bryant is Hebraic rather than apocalyptic; he shows the spirit of the writer of Ecclesiastes rather than of Saint John in Patmos. He seems to say with calm resignation, "The dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." When he so wrote, his eyes had not been opened to the larger vision. Not yet could he accept the saying of the beloved disciple, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."

Readers of Bryant discover that the poet's thoughts upon the subject of immortality were as fluctuating as those of other men. Denial, doubt, hope, and confidence were constantly interchanging with one another in his mind, or mingling there in varying degrees. At times, it has already been pointed out, he saw no more than that where "the glittering current of life" once flowed, the dust

alone remained. Undismayed at this prospect, however, he did not hesitate to apostrophize Death as a friend to mankind, "a deliverer of the oppressed, a reformer always on Virtue's side." Equally stoical could he be at an old man's funeral, dismissing him calmly with the words, "It was his time to die." Though the shock of his father's death led Bryant in early manhood to express the hope that a happier life should dawn to waken the insensible dust, he some years later, in *The Death of the Flowers*, gave voice to no more than resignation — resignation without hope — as he recalled the death of a much loved sister. Still further, even when he contemplated his own dissolution, he thought of himself as passing away "as silently as the South Wind passes"; as departing from sin and suffering to his appointed place, murmuring the names of those whom he loved; as falling asleep beside the undying rivulet which, forever singing down its narrow course, should "mock the fading race of men."

The time came, however, when no more than any other human being could Bryant be content with the thought of annihilation of personality. There was no abiding comfort for him in the surety that we shall be remembered for a time by those whom we leave behind, or in the belief that our influence continues forever in constantly widening circles. These thoughts could not make him look upon old age as less than dreary, upon death as other than death. The question asked in the concluding stanza of *Life* would obtrude itself,

> " When we descend to dust again,
> Where shall the final dwelling be
> Of thought and all its memories then,
> My love for thee, and thine for me?"

Could it be possible, he asked, that he who had for a time been " a part of the brightness of God " should utterly cease to be? dared he hope that his soul might survive the destruction of the body? To these questions he found some faint answer in Nature. Life might perhaps be analogous to the mist which, though " a child of earth cleaving to earth," did nevertheless, vanish from human sight and become a part of the glorious sky. Or yet again death might be like night which, however dark, must give place at last to the resplendent day with all its " warmth and certainty and boundless light."

Doubt thus made way for hope in Bryant's spiritual life, partly because the heart's desire for immortality cannot be stifled, and partly because Nature, however comfortless she may be at times, offers now and then not a little support to belief. This hope, moreover, itself became at length transformed into conviction that Christ really rose from the dead and that even as He returned from the grave, so also shall we. Perceiving that man, made in the image of God, has ever transcended Nature, Bryant felt it but in keeping with divine righteousness and divine economy that the soul of man should not wholly die. True, at the threshold of middle life, Bryant in *The Past* cried out in pain,

" My spirit yearns to bring
The lost ones back — yearns with desire intense,
And struggles hard to wring
Thy bolts apart, and pluck thy captives thence.
In vain; thy gates deny
All passage save to those who hence depart;
Nor to the streaming eye
Tho' giv'st them back — nor to the broken heart."

This cry, however, is not to be interpreted as coming from one who sorrowed without hope. Rather it was an expression of the longing of the eye, of the ear, of the flesh for satisfaction; it was the call of one who, out of the depths of loneliness, desired a present comfort. Depressed though he at times might be, Bryant did not lose hold upon " that Mighty One," who — as we find him saying now in one poem, now in another, — " gave His life for His sheep "; or " went before to prepare a place for His meek followers "; or " as a Conqueror passed the dread barriers, yet returned." Faith indeed became to the poet the substance, the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence, the conviction of things not seen. Christ to him was not merely the Mighty Sufferer who, despised and rejected of men, bore long years ago a grievous weight of pain and scorn, but the Risen Lord: not the God of the dead, but as in *The Conqueror's Grave*, the God of the living,

" He who returning glorious from the grave
Dragged death, disarmed, in chains, a crouching slave."

Taking his stand upon that highest pinnacle of Christian faith, holding that the resurrection of

Christ is the abiding proof that our hope is not vain, Bryant, undismayed could look forth as from a Pisgah height and discern, dimly indeed, but none the less discern, that land which the Lord Himself hath prepared for those that love Him. Within that country, within that world upon whose borders we but hover for a space, only the nobler part of us shall live.

> " All that of good or fair
> Has gone into the tomb from earliest time,
> Shall then come forth to wear
> The glory and the beauty of its prime.
>
> " They have not perished — no!
> Kind words, remembered voices once so sweet,
> Smiles, radiant long ago,
> And features, the great soul's apparent seat,
>
> " All shall come back; each tie
> Of pure affection shall be knit again;
> Alone shall Evil die,
> And Sorrow dwell a prisoner in thy reign."

There, the poet in *The Flood of Years* again assures us, no grief shall assail the heart, no tender ties be broken; past sorrows, too, will be forgotten, or but remembered to make the new life sweeter; wounded hearts shall then be healed forever; parted friends will be once more united, hands will be clasped in joy unspeakable, and the mother's arms will again be folded about the child over whose loss she had bowed herself in suffering. Without such conscious reunion there cannot be, the poet felt, true happiness in Heaven. The sting of cease-

less pain, he saw, must be our lot if we look in vain for " the gentle presence loved on earth," if we fail to hear once more " the voice so sweet in former days," if we cannot " read again the tender thought in eyes serene." In questions that permit but one answer, the poet cried out, in *The Future Life*, to her who had been his perfect companion on earth,

" Will not thy own meek heart demand me there?
That heart whose fondest throbs to me were given—
My name on earth was ever in thy prayer,
And wilt thou never utter it in heaven?

" In meadows fanned by heaven's life-breathing wind,
In the resplendence of that glorious sphere,
And larger movements of the unfettered mind,
Wilt thou forget the love that joined us here?

. . . . . .

" E'en though thou wear'st the glory of the sky,
Wilt thou not keep the same beloved name,
The same fair thoughtful brow, and gentle eye,
Lovelier in heaven's sweet climate, yet the same?

" Shalt thou not teach me, in that calmer home,
The wisdom that I learned so ill in this —
The wisdom which is love — till I become
Thy fit companion in that land of bliss? "

Before this perfect reunion, certain as he considered it, a period of time, Bryant believed in accordance with various passages of Scripture, must elapse. Not infrequently he seems to have held that the souls of the dead sleep dreamlessly, awaiting a reunion with the body when the angel shall sound the trumpet of the resurrection. Now

and then, however, he ventured a more comforting thought: once he suggested the possibility of aerial beings' joining in our earthly worship with harmonies too fine for mortal ear to appreciate; twice he gave voice to the possibility that, although the dead can send no direct messages to the living, they may in some way be enabled to prompt the generous act and gently draw our restless, wandering thoughts from treacherous paths that end in sin; and twice again, with even greater certainty, he went so far as to assert that the spirits of the dead continue to haunt, for a time at least, the rocks and streams they knew of old. The conviction of the prophet and seer is found in the lines which stand at the end of *The Two Graves*,

> " They are here, — they are here, . . .
> In the yellow sunshine and flowing air,
> In the light cloud-shadows that slowly pass
> In the sounds that rise from the murmuring grass.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> " They walk by the waving edge of the wood,
> And list to the long-accustomed flow
> Of the brook that wets the rocks below, —
> Patient, and peaceful, and passionless,
> As seasons on seasons swiftly press,
> They watch, and wait, and linger round."

Belief in a personal immortality beneath the sway of a just and righteous God is to many a man the final solution of all the serious problems of our restless, questioning life. Certainly long before his death Bryant, by attaining that belief, entered into peace — the peace which the Apostle asserted

passeth all understanding. Devious had been the paths which the poet had followed, yet all had made toward the goal at which he finally arrived. Nature, History, study, contemplation, reflection, each helped him to gain insight into the ways of God. Sorrow, pain, affliction, loss, each in the long run strengthened his hope, until hope itself was lost in the conviction that, though the body die, the soul persists, mindful of all that made life sweet, forgetful of all that made life bitter. Thus it was that long before Bryant had reached old age, patience had wrought its perfect work within his heart. As we read the noble poem *Waiting by the Gate*, we plainly see that no shrinking marred the poet's faith when he approached the bounds of life. Though by reason of his strength his years were literally four-score years, yet was his step firm, his eye uplifted, his brow serene. No doubt, no dread dogged his path; he bade good-night with words of cheer, full certain that he should awaken from the sleep of death, refreshed and strong.

III

EDGAR ALLAN POE

It is popular opinion that the most minute research into the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe will not meet with any discovery that can be called even remotely religious — much less Christian. It is readily admitted, of course, that Poe makes frequent mention of cherubim and seraphim, of angels and demons, of soul and spirit, of heaven and hell; yet it is quite likely to be added without delay that these terms are hardly more than mere words in a poet's unusually musical vocabulary, and must therefore be looked upon as not so much as even hinting at any article of faith. To one who attempts to assert that there is any positive religious teaching whatever in the poetry of Poe, it will be pointed out that the poet makes quite as ready use of names drawn from paganism and Islam as from Judaism and Christianity, that he gives no preference to the Eden of the Hebrews over the Aidenn of the Arabians, and that he speaks of the works of Eblis as no less certainly evil than those of Satan. Beyond a doubt, angels and ghouls, fairies and elves, naiads and dryads, are all equally real to Poe. With him Edis, the Tartar divinity presiding over virtuous love takes the place of the Greek Aphrodite; the Phoenician

Astarte and the Latin Diana, each the goddess of birth, are presented side by side; and Azrael of the Talmud, the angel who awaits the separation of the soul from the body at the moment of death, is not inferior to Israfel of the Koran, that melodious spirit "whose heart-strings are a lute," and who, possessed of the sweetest voice of all God's creatures, stands ready to sound the trumpet of the resurrection.

The contention of those who maintain that no religious thought is discoverable in Poe might perhaps be allowed to stand, were it not that the instances which they almost always adduce in support of their assertions, prove too much. Failing to find anything in Poe that is strongly Christian, they cite his frequent use of non-Christian terms to show that he is not religious at all. It ought not to be necessary to point out that before one speaks in criticism of any work of literature, one should take pains to become acquainted with the author's point of view and method of expression. All the beings whose names are recorded in the poetry of Poe — whether they are Hebrew or Christian, pagan or Moslem — had, to Poe's mind, a very real place in that strange land created by his delicate yet vivid imagination. Insufficiently material to be of the earth, earthy; insufficiently spiritual to be of the heaven, heavenly, they were to the man who created them, as they are still to his appreciative readers, true shadows, albeit inhabiting a world which is hardly more than a shadow. They constitute, indeed, what Poe in another

connection has himself denominated a dream within a dream.

The vagueness of the realm created by Poe may be safely regarded as the outcome of his theory of just what poetry is. Early in life Poe, writing to a friend, asserted that in his opinion, "A poem is opposed to romance by having for its object, an *indefinite* instead of a *definite* pleasure, being a poem only so far as this object is attained; romance presenting perceptible images with definite, poetry with *in*definite sensations, to which end music is an *essential*, since the comprehension of sweet sound is our most indefinite conception." With this point of view in mind, one readily perceives the reason on one hand of the tenuous, the evanescent character of Poe's world of fancy; and on the other of his ready acceptance of proper names which make the inhabitants of his spiritual world an assemblage hardly less mixed — hardly less cosmopolitan, if the word will be allowed — than was, let us say, Milton's once happy throng of angels before a part of them were lost and changed through pride. The undeviating use of terms which fall quite readily from the lips of western theologians in discussing their exceedingly accurate ideas of heaven must almost certainly have ended, to Poe's way of thinking, in an image altogether too definite. It is not beyond thought, indeed, that even Saint John's minutely circumstantial description of the heavenly Jerusalem was to Poe most veritable prose. On the other hand, the mythology of the Greeks or the Romans, and the religious

conceptions of Mahomet contained for him many names of peculiar value. When they are used, their denotation in the minds of nearly all readers is so slight as to leave but an indefinite impression — nevertheless they are rich in connotation, in suggestiveness. Still further their mere sound is often exceedingly beautiful — frequently all but music itself. To the attuned ear, for an instance, there is an unusual pleasure in such a word as Israfel and its doublet Israfeli. Thus it came about that Poe sought the elements of his spiritual world where he would, and seized upon them wherever he found them.

In that vague, indefinite world of Poe's, pictured to the reader through the use of musical words borrowed from many far-separated sources, the personality of God, although seldom mentioned and almost as rarely referred to, is given a peculiar, perhaps a quite convincing, vividness. This impression does not arise from the poet's asserting that his God has or has not lent him " respite and nepenthe from his memories of Lenore," or from his writing in *The Sleeper*,

> " I pray to God that she may lie
> Forever with unopened eye,
> While the dim sheeted ghosts go by! "

Such passages have their value, no doubt, but two others may be cited to prove the existence in Poe of that state of mind which attends the rare experience of every believer when he feels that he stands in the immediate presence of God Himself. The first of these constitutes the great part of the poem

entitled *Silence.* Read attentively, it is seen to be the expression of that surpassing sense of trust which arises in the soul of man when the heart is all-confounded beneath the Overpowering Mystery.

" There is a two-fold Silence — sea and shore —
Body and soul. One dwells in lonely places,
Newly with grass o'ergrown; some solemn graces,
Some human memories and tearful lore
Render him terrorless: his name's ' No More.'
He is the corporate Silence: dread him not!
No power hath he of evil in himself;
But should some urgent fate (untimely lot!)
Bring thee to meet his shadow (nameless elf
That haunteth the lone regions where hath trod
No foot of man), commend thyself to God! "

The very strength of this passage lies in its vagueness. No man but has some time had the experience here set down; yet no man, — try as he may, — can give that experience greater definiteness.

The second passage is found in the early unnamed poem beginning,

" In youth have I known one with whom the Earth,
In secret, communing held."

The reader soon discovers that the poet is conscious of an unseen, yet personal Presence, half doubted, yet not wholly dismissible.

" Perhaps it may be that my mind is wrought
To a fever by the moonbeam that hangs o'er;
But I will half believe that wild light fraught
With more of sovereignty than ancient lore
Hath ever told; — or is it of a thought
The unembodied essence, and no more
That with a quickening spell doth o'er us pass
As dew of the night-time o'er the summer grass? "

Here again is the indefinite, the vague; yet the poet's conclusion is illuminating. His answer to his own question is, —

> " 'Tis a symbol and a token
> Of what in other worlds shall be, — and given
> In beauty by our God to those alone
> Who otherwise would fall from life and Heaven."

Philosophically considered, this experience, one critic tells us, is the unblinding of the poet to the Spirit of Beauty; poetically considered, it is, according to Byron, whom Poe himself quotes, the intense reply of Nature's intelligence to ours; religiously considered, it is, to the mind of the believer, a manifestation of God.

To complete our understanding of Poe's conception of God — at least in so far as he saw fit to reveal it in his verse — we must bring another poem under levy. In *Al Aaraaf*, the angel Nesace is vouchsafed an answer to her prayer; yet this record of an exhibition of divine grace is of far less importance to us than the assertion that of all the spheres which whirl in the heavens, ours is " the favored one of God." Still, though thus favored, it is found wanting in the balance. We hear a tone of regret when

> " In realms on high
> The eternal voice of God is passing by
> And the red winds are withering in the sky,"—

a tone of regret that our world, " linked to a little system and one sun," is a world

> " Where all God's love is folly, and the crowd
> Still think His terrors but the thunder cloud,
> The storm, the earthquake, and the ocean-wrath."

Meagre as are the passages thus far laid under contribution, we may conclude from them that to Poe's mind the Supreme Being is a personal God to whom men and angels may address their prayers with an expectation of reply. If He must be regarded as a Being beyond the comprehension of man, He none the less gives to the human soul a sense of nearness, especially in hours of terror and dread, and, sometimes, a not incomprehensible message to the heart. Still further Poe gives indication of believing that, though God holds the heavens as a very little thing in the hollow of His hand, He not the less bends above our earth in special solicitation and ceases not to care for the children of men. Expressing the idea in the terms of the theologian, one is safe in saying that Poe's conception of God is theistic. Despite his mention of heathen deities and his attribution of personality to them, he apparently held to a belief in the existence of one God transcending the universe in His personality, yet immanent in it in His knowledge and action.

Whatever Poe's attitude towards God may have been, no trace of the idea of the Trinity can anywhere be discovered in his poetry. The Holy Spirit is never mentioned or His existence even most remotely implied. To the Son, it is true, there is an occasional reference; but the expression, " For the Holy Jesus' sake," and the address to the Virgin

as the Mother of God, hardly leads one to think that Poe's mind had dwelt upon the great doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement. True, in the dramatic monologue of *Tamerlane*, the dying conqueror speaks to a monk, but he tells his story only after he has assured his listener that no power of earth can shrive his dying soul of the sin his unearthly pride has revelled in. Again, in the drama *Politian*, a priest enters, and some use is made of a crucifix; still, there is nothing to show that Poe himself reacted upon the great central fact of Christianity. Rather may we assume that his real attitude towards Jesus of Nazareth is to be found in certain lines of *The Coliseum*. There the poet exclaims as he gazes upon what he calls "the rich reliquary of lofty contemplation left to Time," —

> "I kneel, an altered and an humble man,
> Amid thy shadows, and so drink within
> My very soul thy grandeur, gloom, and glory!
>
> "Vastness! and Age! and Memories of Eld!
> Silence! and Desolation! and dim night!
> I feel ye now — I feel ye in your strength —
> O spells more sure than e'er Judæan king
> Taught in the gardens of Gethsemane!"

All things considered, therefore, it must be admitted that although Poe's conception of God is theistic, it is not in the strict sense, — perhaps not in any sense, — Christian.

In passing, attention may properly be called to Poe's occasional use of the Scriptures. In *Politian*

the sorrowful Lalage asks for a copy of the Holy Evangelists since, —

> " If there be balm
> For the wounded spirit in Gilead, it is there!
> Dew in the night time of my bitter trouble
> Will there be found — " dew sweeter far than that
> Which hangs like chains of pearl on Hermon hill."

It is of some little interest perhaps to observe that the expression " balm in Gilead," taken from the book of the prophet Jeremiah, occurs also in *The Raven;* and that the passage which makes mention of the dew of Hermon, drawn from the one hundred and thirty-third Psalm, reappears almost word for word in the lines which bear the title *To* —— ——. Again the words, " Let there be light," are so used in the poem, *To M. L. S.* that beyond a doubt they must have been quoted from the first chapter of Genesis; and of course the opening words of the threnody, *Lenore*, " Ah! broken is the golden bowl " is a reminiscence of the well-known passage in the book of *Ecclesiastes.* Finally, Poe in the notes appended to *Al Aaraaf* twice makes quotations from the *Bible*, first that beautiful expression from the *Revelation* of Saint John, " and golden vials full of odors which are the prayers of the saints " and later those tender words from the one hundred and twenty-first Psalm, " The sun shall not harm thee by day, nor the moon by night." The very attractiveness of all these quotations, however, and the uses to which they are put, show plainly that they appeal to Poe primarily through their harmonious diction. His incorporation of

them into his work, therefore, proves but little, certainly it gives no more accurate insight into the state of his mind and belief than does his adaptation of a passage of the Koran to stand at the head of his poem *Israfel.*

Turning now to Poe's thoughts upon the question of life beyond the grave, we find that they range all the way from a dull conception of death as a sleep to a full certainty of a conscious, — possibly an active immortality. Never quite descending to the depth of thinking that death ends all, he not the less quietly — perhaps gladly — utters in *Al Aaraaf* the words,

" Beyond that death no immortality —
But sleep that pondereth and is not " to be " —
And there — oh! may my weary spirit dwell —
Apart from Heaven's Eternity — and yet how far from Hell! "

This longing for sleep is evidently not a condition in which the mind is inactive. Indeed, the dead man who speaks the lines entitled *For Annie* fully apprehends his state and quite contentedly accepts his lot.

" Thank heaven! the crisis —
The danger is past,
And the fever called ' Living '
Is conquered at last.
. . . . . .

" And ah! let it never
Be foolishly said
That my room it is gloomy
And narrow my bed —

For a man never slept
In a different bed;
And to *sleep*, you must slumber
In just such a bed."

Yet mere quiet, satisfying sleep is not the only gain from death. The tantalized spirit lies wholly at peace, bathing in many a dream of the truth, recalling the beauty of Annie, remembering with joy that moment of death when, the lover says,

"She tenderly kissed me,
And fondly caressed,
And then I fell gently
To sleep on her breast.

. . . . . .

"And she prayed to the angels
To keep me from harm —
To the queen of the angels
To shield me from harm."

Poe, however, was not always in a mood to be satisfied with what may perhaps be called passive immortality. At times he rose to a full conviction that the soul passes to another plane of existence. In *Lenore*, he exclaimed,

"To friends above, from fiends below, the indignant ghost is. riven —
From Hell into a high estate far up within the Heaven —
From grief and groan to a golden throne beside the King of Heaven."

There, in the presence of that King, Poe implied, one may hope for the conscious reunion of souls. Says the speaker in *The Raven*, eagerly adjuring his visitor,

"By that Heaven that bends above us — by that God we both adore —
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels call Lenore—
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels call Lenore."

Although the answer to this appeal was a disheartening "Nevermore," we need not interpret the reply as an expression of disbelief in the possibility of immortality, — rather was it the word of final judgment upon a soul which had in some way made itself unworthy of such happiness as it longed for. In striking contrast stands another lover created by the fancy of Poe. He asks no question, would brook, we may be sure, no condemnation, no refusal. Sure of himself, his love, and his fate, he cries out with that passionate conviction which is nothing less than truth,

"Neither the angels in Heaven above,
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee."

Approaching the question of immortality from still another point of view, we discover that Poe in one place addresses a poem to a soul in Paradise as though that soul could hear the words that fall from mortal lips; that in *Dreamland* he mentions

"White robed forms of friends long given,
In agony, to the Earth — and Heaven";

and that in *Spirits of the Dead*, a poem in which he speaks of death as inevitable, he urges a noble and

fearless adjustment of the soul to that great hour of change.

> " Be silent in that solitude
> Which is not loneliness — for then
> The spirits of the dead who stood
> In life before thee, are again
> In death around thee — and their will
> Shall overshadow thee; be still.
>
> " The night — tho' clear — shall frown,
> And the stars shall not look down
> From their high thrones in the Heaven
> With light like Hope to mortals given, —
> But their red orbs without beam,
> To thy weariness shall seem
> As a burning and a fever
> Which would cling to thee forever."

These lines, despite the strength, the resignation which their author perhaps hoped they would impart, bring us face to face with that horror of death which nearly two hundred years of Christian faith and hope have failed appreciably to eradicate from the heart of man. For Poe this horror always had a peculiar fascination. It drew him so insistently, in fact, that, look where he would, all things seemed to partake of its ominous nature. In its own character it is the fundamental thought of *The City in the Sea;* somewhat softened indeed, yet none the less repellent, it becomes the horror of insanity in *The Haunted Palace;* still sinister, it is the horror of nightmare in *Dreamland;* and finally strident, discordant, soul-wracking, it is the horror of life in *The Conqueror Worm.*

All things taken into consideration, the poetry

of Poe offers little to the soul which questions or doubts, — far less to the heart which seeks help or comfort. Undoubtedly Poe believed in God, a Being who, because He hears and perhaps answers prayer, must be deemed personal; yet so vaguely does the poet define that personality that one is not lifted even momentarily into a state of certainty, confidence, or trust. Almost as certainly, Poe also believed that the soul persists after the death of the body; but in his expression of this faith, he was often not less vague than he was when he spoke of his belief in God. Not seldom, it has to be added, his ideas are dangerously near being repulsive, and often they are an expression, not so much of hope, as of despair. Beyond these tenets of God and immortality — tenets which, as he phrases them, are far more pagan than Christian in character — the religion of Poe did not reach. In other words, the spiritual belief of the most musical of American poets, say the best that we can, was poverty-stricken.

It is quite useless to inquire, had Poe's belief been richer, would his life have been happier? or had his life been happier, would his belief have been richer? The most cursory acquaintance with the life of Edgar Allan Poe shows that, like the speaker in *The Raven*, he was one

> " Whom unmerciful Disaster
> Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore —
> Till the dirges of his Hope the melancholy burden bore
> Of ' Never — nevermore.' "

No poet ever deserved our pity more — neither Byron, nor Shelley, nor Keats. The slender pipe on which he blew gave forth but few tones — "most musical, most melancholy." From his poetry one cannot gain religiously either the higher uplift or the broader outlook; yet one whose belief has become settled, whose faith is at poise, lays down the poetry of Poe in no spirit of harsh criticism. Poe, like Shelley, was a radiant spirit who "vainly beat his luminous wings in a void." Only pity, — gentle, kindly pity, — can be felt for the man who without becoming unmanly, laid his inmost heart bare in the sorrowful words of *A Dream within a Dream*,

"You are not wrong who deem
That my days have been a dream:
Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none.
Is it therefore the less *gone?*
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.

"I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand —
How few! yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep — while I weep!
O God! can I not grasp
Them with tighter clasp?
O God! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is *all* that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?"

IV

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

In passing from Poe to Emerson, we turn from the most lyrical of American poets to one who, from at least some points of view, was the least articulate. Poe's thought, it must be conceded, was, even at its richest, but vague and thin, yet his voice was at no time other than flute-like; Emerson's thought, on the contrary, was hardly ever less than profound, yet he made such desperate work with rhyme and rhythm, that not infrequently he fell short of giving his message clear utterance. He indeed is often accused of having had but a clouded vision himself, for there exist a large number of readers who, however eager they are to get at his secret, are forced to admit that they can do no more than guess at the meaning which lies concealed beneath many of the not infrequently halting lines. Still, in spite of Emerson's inability to express himself simply, directly, and clearly in verse, he must not be too hastily accused of obscurity. Before declaring that Emerson, weighed in the balance, has been found wanting, the reader would do well to take the measure of his own powers. Only he who has ears to hear, can receive Emerson's message; yet that message no inconsiderable number of listeners have professed to hear and to understand. Such men and women do not deny that Emerson

was often unable to beat his music out, yet they do not hesitate to insist that his eye was single, his whole body full of light.

On the evidence just alleged, one may perhaps allow the contention that Emerson's vision was always clear at least to himself, and still hold to the assertion that his writings are far from being easy reading. Certainly his verse is often quite obscure, and in general is far more difficult to understand than his prose. True, his essays are not meant, as Meredith, in speaking of a work of his own, once said, " for little people or for fools "; yet in a first reading they usually give up at least the trend of their thought, whereas many of his poems remain enigmatic for a considerable period of time even to those whose souls are well attuned to their teachings. Despite the difficulty of the poems, however, their value is great. Indeed, it is probably safe to say, that were every line of Emerson's prose obliterated, his essential thought would still be preserved in his poetry. In other words, Emerson's essays are but Emerson's poems cast in another mold — the prose is the alloyed ore; the poetry, the pure gold. Valuable indeed, then, are the poems; yet their value must be even more highly estimated, — they lead us more directly than do the essays to Emerson himself, more immediately into his presence. In a certain sense they are autobiographical almost without exception; they exhibit their author's personality in a light that seldom, if ever, attends the essays; they permit us to see his thought at work, they

show us his soul as it reached out experimentally rather than finally to lay hold upon God and His righteousness. For this reason, Emerson's poetry, rather than his essays, is the ultimate source to which we must go, if we would arrive at any adequate understanding of his religion, his interpretation of life, and his explanation of the interrelation between Nature, man, and God.

In an endeavor to reach any just estimate of Emerson's faith and belief, we are confronted at the outset with an almost insurmountable difficulty, that of differentiating his religion from his philosophy. We are sometimes told, it is true, that Emerson never evolved a philosophy, for taking into account even the whole collection of his writings, we cannot discover there a systematic body of general conceptions. Nevertheless, Emerson is at times as plainly philosophic as he is at other times plainly religious. He is often objective, yet more often subjective; now he brings his intellect to the fore, now his feelings. No doubt it is quite impossible to determine beyond question when Emerson's convictions are based upon observation or reached by logical processes, and when they are the outcome of intuition, or — shall we say it? — inspiration, superinduced either by meditation, or by contemplation of nature, or by absorption into what he himself called Universal Mind. Impossible it may be to mark the separation, yet one feels, as one reads, that a poem like *Initial, Dæmonic, and Celestial Love* is an expression of philosophic thought, and one like *Threnody* of

religious feeling. Such a statement as this, however, has its dangers, for certain writers upon philosophy have not hesitated to assert their right to all of Emerson, and many interested in religion have made as large a counter-claim. He, therefore, who undertakes to disentangle the threads of Emerson's philosophy and religion lays himself open to attack. Indeed he is little likely to please anybody — perhaps least of all himself. Nevertheless, bleak as the prospect is, the attempt must be made.

Early in his career as a writer, Emerson was accused of being a pantheist, and, because a pantheist, a disbeliever in the personality of God. In the sense in which the charges were made, both were false; in a larger sense, both were true. Emerson was not a pantheist in the sense that he held to the doctrine of there being no God other than the combined forces and laws which are manifested in the existing universe. He is pantheistic in the sense that he believed in an infinite Essence, from which all things emerge and into which all things return. He could permit himself to write in the poem entitled *Pan*,

> "Being's tide
> Swells hitherward, and myriads of forms
> Live, robed with beauty, painted by the sun;
> Their dust, pervaded by the nerves of God
> Throbs with an overmastering energy
> Knowing and doing. Ebbs the tide, they lie
> White hollow shells upon the desert shore,
> But not the less the eternal wave rolls on
> To animate new millions, and exhale
> Races and planets, its enchanted foam."

Yet Emerson did not deny the personality of God, as the result of any acceptancy of the pantheistic teachings that the infinite Essence is without self-consciousness and self-activity, and that the flow of Nature is caused by an Agency which has no cognizance of its own work except in so far as it comes to self-realization in the life of man. He did, however, deny that personality in the ordinary sense of the word; " for," as he wrote in his *Journal* " the expression suggests too little rather than too much, making one think of Him as having the individuality of a great man such as the crowd worships, instead of possessing a nature which soars infinitely out of all definition, and dazzles all inquest." Such a denial of the personality of God is plainly nothing more than a rejection of a word in order to keep the great positive fact behind it, — an assertion adequately supported by the lines called *The Bohemian Hymn:*

" In many forms we try
To utter God's infinity,
But the boundless hath no form,
And the Universal Friend
Doth as far transcend
An angel as a worm.

" The great Idea baffles wit,
Language falters under it,
It leaves the learned in the lurch;
Nor art, nor power, nor toil can find
The measure of the eternal Mind
Nor hymn, nor prayer, nor church."

Emerson was a block of stumbling in his day and

generation, and has to some extent remained so ever since, mainly because he was endeavoring — perhaps unconsciously — to interpret quite literally the statement of the apostle that in God we live and move and have our being. In the conclusion at which he arrived, he found himself at variance with the theist in one exceedingly important point — the relation existing between the Creator and His universe. The theist holds that God in His personality transcends the world, which He created out of nothing. If theism stopped with this assertion, the doctrine would be but that form of deism which maintains that the world has no vital connection with its Maker, being wholly guided indeed by unalterable laws which He imposed at the time He performed the act of creation. This opinion, it may be said in passing, is held at the present day by the majority of scientists who are not agnostics or atheists. But though theism regards God as the Creator of all things, it is not content to think of Him as an impassive Spectator content to view from some distant vantage point the inevitable workings of unchangeable commands. In place of such a cold and forbidding conception, it advances the doctrine of immanence, insisting that an inherent, indwelling God, having infinite wisdom, compassion, and will, continues to operate within the universe. With this rich form of the doctrine, many pantheists would disagree, but Emerson certainly accepted it sufficiently to make it a part of his religion. Surely something warmer than philosophy was struggling for expres-

sion when he lifted his voice in thanksgiving that God had prevented his falling into the depths of sin, and when he asserted that God, approached in the spirit of true prayer, cannot withhold His conquering aid. The conviction of his heart was added to the conviction of his head when he gave utterance to his belief that " man in the bush with God may meet "; when he assured the Rhodora in the woods that the selfsame power which brought him there brought her too; and when he wrote, in the lines headed *Written at Rome*, the message exhorting a lonely soul to possess itself in patience,

> " Wait then, sad friend, wait in majestic peace
> The hour of heaven. Generously trust
> Thy fortune's web to the beneficent hand
> That until now has put the world in fee
> To thee. He watches for thee still. His love
> Broods over thee, and as God lives in heaven,
> However long thou walkest solitary.
> The hour of heaven shall come, the man appear."

With the theistic doctrine of the immanence of a personal God in the universe, then, Emerson must be regarded as being in full accord; but with the often closely related belief that God is transcendent in the sense of being in some way disconnected with the world, he could not agree. In his earliest book, Emerson recorded his conviction that Nature is a varying manifestation of one unvarying spiritual substance, the multiform phenomena of one unchanging God. Whether or not, like the extreme pantheists, he held that the sum total of the universe is completely identical with God in

His infinite entirety may or may not be disputed; but from the opinion that all is God and God is one, he seems never to have wavered. This belief is the fundamental thought of the lines entitled *Xenophanes;* it made possible the seeming paradoxes in the poem *Brahma;* it found still another expression in the second part of *Woodnotes.*

> "Ever fresh the broad creation,
> A divine improvisation,
> From the heart of God proceeds,
> A single Will, a million deeds.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "As the bee through the garden ranges,
> From world to world the godhead changes;
> As the sheep go feeding in the waste,
> From form to form He maketh haste;
> This vault which glows immense with light
> Is the inn where he lodges for a night.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "Alike to him the better, the worse, —
> The glowing angel, the outcast corse.
> Thou meetest him by centuries,
> And lo! he passes like the breeze;
> Thou seek'st in globe the galaxy,
> He hides in true transparency;
> Thou askest in fountain and in fires,
> He is the essence that inquires.
> He is the axis of the star;
> He is the sparkle of the spar;
> He is the heart of every creature;
> He is the meaning of each feature;
> And his mind is the sky.
> Than all it holds, more deep, more high."

Despite the teaching of the quotation just given, readers of Emerson must not forget that in his

outlook upon Nature he had more than one point of view. As an inhabitant of the physical world, he never denied the reality of matter; as an inhabitant of the spiritual world, he did deny that matter is an ultimate reality. In a considerable number of poems, such as *The Humble Bee*, *May-Day*, *The Adirondacks*, *The Snow-Storm* and *Musketaquid*, he treated Nature as any other poet might treat it; sometimes, it is true, highly personifying it and richly endowing it with such light as never was on sea or land, yet still regarding it as a fact, as having actual existence apart from himself. In this mood he could write in *May-Day* the exquisite lines, —

> "I saw the bud-crowned Spring go forth,
> Stepping daily onward north
> To greet staid ancient cavaliers
> Filing single in stately train.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "I saw the Days deformed and low,
> Short and bent by cold and snow;
> The merry Spring threw wreaths on them,
> Flower-wreaths gay with bud and bell;
> Many a flower and many a gem,
> They were refreshed by the smell,
> They shook the snow from hats and shoon,
> They put their April garments on;
> And those eternal forms,
> Unhurt by a thousand storms,
> Shot up to the height of the sky again."

When Emerson thus treats Nature, he is, in the minds of many of his readers, at his best. Be that as it may, he went not often to the woods, the

mountains, or the sea, as goes the poet or the artist who finds his chief satisfaction in beauty of form or color or outline. Least of all did he invade the valley and the forest in the spirit of the scientist or the workman. A certain mild impatience speaks in the lines occurring early in the poem entitled *Blight*, —

> " But these young scholars, who invade the hills,
> Bold as the engineer who fells the wood,
> And travelling often in the cut he makes,
> Love not the flower they pluck, and know it not,
> And all their botany is Latin names."

Such study had no attraction for him. Rather did he go to Nature like the philosopher of old, who preferring things to names,—

> " Were Unitarians of the united world,
> And, wheresoever their clear eye-beams fell,
> They caught the footsteps of the SAME.

Nature, according to Emerson, is a channel through which God comes to man; or better, since she is no less than a manifestation of God, she is a divine message daily spread before our eyes, hourly spoken in our ears. Emerson arrived at this conclusion less by intellectual effort than by intuition, yet his conviction was none the less certain that he had heard the voice of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; that he had stood beside Him in the mount, and had talked with Him face to face; that he might at any time, in the forest, or by the river, or on the shore of the sea, be rapt into an ecstasy and behold in flower or tree, in tide

or wave, the true vision beatific. Thus to Emerson, Nature at times was very God — speaking directly and distinctly to His children. Not all men, however, he admitted in *My Garden*, are able to receive the message; and even to the few who are, the experience is intermittent and the power of expression often limited.

> " Ever the words of the gods resound;
> But the porches of man's ear
> Seldom in this low life's round
> Are unsealed, that he may hear.
>
> " Wandering voices in the air
> And murmurs in the wold
> Speak what I cannot declare.
> Yet cannot all withhold.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> " But the meanings cleave to the lake,
> Cannot be carried in book or urn;
> Go thy ways now, come later back,
> On waves and hedges still they burn."

In the broadest sense of the term Nature must of course include man, nor did Emerson hesitate to give the term its larger meaning. To him man like Nature was to be regarded as a manifestation of spirit. Of himself he did not hesitate to say more than once, " I am part and particle of God," nor did he mean less by that assertion than that all men are in a true sense divine. One necessary conclusion drawn from that belief brought him into clash with the Trinitarians, for although it cannot be construed to deny the divinity of Christ, it plainly disturbs an assumed balance by elevating

every man to an essential equality with Him. As in the matter of the personality of God, where Emerson rejected the term to keep the idea, here he rejected the idea to keep the term. The life of the Nazarene he felt to be but the experience of every man writ large. Christ, to use Emerson's own expression in one poem, was sweet Mary's boy, Boy-Rabbi, Israel's paragon; elsewhere he was the Blessed Jew; once was He classified with Dante, once with Caesar, and twice with Plato and Shakespeare. In no case was he hailed as greater or more god-like than they — certainly never as the Son of God in any peculiar sense, never as the exclusive Way, the Truth, and the Life. Like those with whom Emerson associated Him in thought, He had failed in some particular, He had disappointed the yearning heart of mother Nature. To her regret that not even in Christ had the perfect man yet appeared, Emerson gave voice in his *Song of Nature*, —

> " I travail in pain for him,
> My creatures travail and wait;
> His couriers come by squadrons,
> He comes not to the gate.
>
> " Twice I have moulded an image,
> And thrice outstretched my hand,
> Made one of day and one of night
> And one of the salt sea-sand.
>
> " One in a Judæan manger,
> And one by Avon stream,
> One over against the mouths of Nile,
> And one in the Academe.

"I moulded kings and saviors,
And bards o'er kings to rule; —
But fell the starry influence short,
The cup was never full."

It is interesting to discover at this point that although Emerson rejected Christ as the Son of God, in the Trinitarian sense, he accepted, perhaps quite unconsciously to himself, the doctrine of the third person of the triune God-head. The Over-Soul of Emerson, as Oliver Wendell Holmes long ago pointed out in his biography of his friend, is that aspect of Deity which is known to theology as the Holy Spirit. It is universally diffused, yet it dwells in the heart of man, leading him to all truth. "Henceforth," wrote Emerson in an early poem called *Self-Reliance*,

"I will be
Light-hearted as a bird, and live with God.
I find him in the bottom of my heart,
I hear continually his voice therein,
. . . . . .
"The little needle always knows the North,
The little bird remembereth his note,
And this wise Seer within me never errs.
I never taught it what it teaches me;
I only follow, when I act aright."

Starting with the idea that there is one Universal Mind common to all individual men, and that by consequence whatever Plato has thought another may think, and whatever a saint has felt, another may feel, and whatever has befallen any man, another may understand, Emerson advanced to the ground that this Eternal Mind, this Over-Soul,

as he called it; this Holy Spirit, as he did not call it —infinitely diffused, though still a unit, finds a dwelling place in man. It tries all things, it instructs the heart, it is The Informing Spirit, as Emerson wrote in a poem to which he gave that very name: —

> "There is no great and no small
> To the Soul that maketh all:
> And where it cometh, all things are;
> And it cometh everywhere.
>
> "I am the owner of the sphere,
> Of the seven stars and the solar year,
> Of Cæsar's hand, and Plato's brain,
> Of Lord Christ's heart, and Shakespeare's strain."

Thus Nature and the Soul, both manifestations of God, were to Emerson the two sources of insight into Divine Spirit. From without, Nature spoke to him a various language in a far higher sense than she ever spoke to Bryant; from within the Soul unceasingly whispered to him the lesson of his oneness with Eternal Mind. Confident in his intuition that Nature and Soul are phenomena of Spirit or — if the expression will now be allowed — are God, he found the doctrine of Idealism most acceptable to his mind. In his lecture called *The Transcendentalist,* he wrote: "The materialist takes his departure from the external world and esteems a man as one product of that. The idealist takes his departure from his consciousness and reckons the world an appearance. . . . His thought, that is the Universe." In other words, Nature, according to Emerson, exists only as there is mind to appreciate it; every accompanying circum-

stance may be present, but before anything is, there must come into the field of these circumstances a mind to receive their impact, to recognize them, and to relate them into phenomena. Thus only does the eternal world have being. Nature, therefore, although she may have come forth from God, is inferior to thinking man who, since she depends upon him for existence, is in a certain sense her creator, thereby exhibiting, albeit in miniature, characteristics of the great Original from which both he and she sprang. In the poems no long passage supports this doctrine, but the allusions to the supremacy of thought are not few. The eternality of Thought's holy light is insisted upon; the poet is urged to speed the stars of Thought unto their shining goals; the rocks of Nature, it is pointed out, are the quarry whence Thought draws its material to build its mansions; and where Thought unlocks her mysteries, Emerson maintained, one walks in marble galleries and talks with kings. A man, Emerson believed, — at least he so expressed himself in *The Poet* — might well give all that he has for thought,

> "For thought and not praise;
> Thought is the wages
> For which I sell days,
> Will gladly sell ages
> And willingly grow old,
> Deaf, and dumb, and blind, and cold,
> Melting matter into dreams,
> Panoramas which I saw,
> And whatever glows or seems
> Into substance, into Law."

The idealism of Emerson led him to dismiss the problem of Evil as one of no great importance. Even when the grave, practical question of slavery was stirring the United States, he was late in becoming aggressively interested. To him the freeing of the bodies of men seemed but a slight thing in comparison with the freeing of their minds. One need not conclude from this assertion that Emerson was indifferent to the subject, or that he believed his friends and neighbors were making mountains out of mole-hills. On the contrary, he understood and approved of their motives and work; but he plainly felt that, so far as he was concerned, his work lay in another and more important field. In consequence, the North was seething over the matter of slavery in general, and Massachusetts was strongly agitated over the Fugitive Slave Act in particular, long before Emerson came to see that his duty called him to define his position.

Emerson had a mighty trust that all things work together for good to them that love God, or, to use his own term, to them that live in the Spirit. He dared write as one of the fragments gathered under the general title of *Life*,—

> "No fate, save by the victim's fault, is low,
> For God hath writ all dooms magnificent,
> So guilt not traverses His tender will."

What matters Evil then? he could easily bring himself to ask. To him privation, suffering, and sorrow were but blessings in disguise, thrusting men back upon the realization that they had been

made but little lower than the angels, — but a little lower than God. As in *Brahma*, the red slayer might think he had slain, the slain might think that he had been slain; yet to Emerson as he recorded in *The Park*, —

> " Yet spake yon purple mountain,
> Yet said yon ancient wood,
> That Night or Day, that Love or Crime,
> Leads all souls to the Good."

The frequent occurrence of such thought and reasoning in both the verse and the prose of Emerson led John Morley to assert that if the Concord poet saw Evil at all, he saw it through the softening and illusive medium of generalized phrases. He had, as some one else has said, " no understanding of that heavy burden and impediment upon the soul which the churches call Sin, and which, whatever name we call it by, is a very real catastrophe in the moral nature of man." Evil, he felt, was not an active principle, it was merely the negation of Good. Death to him was simply not life; sickness, not health; grief, not joy. He held that in time, as man advances in his spiral upward course, the negations must all give way to affirmations and Evil cease to be. Whenever Emerson contemplated evil at all, he thought of it as a discipline which can work no final harm. This discovery was the knowledge of his Uriel, who speaking in the poem to which his own name is given, pointed out that

> "Line in nature is not found;
> Unit and universe are round;
> In vain produced, all rays return;
> Evil will bless, and ice will burn."

A school of philosophers with whom Emerson is sometimes popularly associated holds that evil wholly ceases to be, that the highest Good is reached only when the soul, completely losing its identity, is reabsorbed into God from whom it sprang and from whom for a time it has been differentiated. As a matter of fact Emerson was wholly averse to this doctrine, firmly entrenching himself in a belief in the persistence of individuality. God, he agreed, is self-reliant, self-sufficient; man is God in miniature, therefore man, like God, is self-reliant, self-sufficient. He spoke for himself no less than for the old Greek philosopher in the unnamed fragment assigned a place in the general collection to which the title *Life* has been given, —

> "The brave Empedocles, defying fools,
> Pronounced the word that mortals hate to hear —
> I am divine, I am not mortal made;
> I am superior to my human weeds."

This certainty of one's divinity is the key to the meaning of much that is obscure in Emerson — clearly it unlocks the famous stanzas called *The Sphinx*. In that poem, which is the despair of many a reader, Emerson was merely maintaining that he who forgets his superiority to his material surroundings, lacks perspective, lives only in the particular, sees only difference. To such a man the world addresses a question which he cannot

answer, for his mind is torn in pieces and vanquished by distracting variety. But he who is no longer timid or apologetic, or abject, he who dares to say, "I think, I am," he, and not the world, is the great unanswered question; to him time and the things of time can give but a false reply. Before such a defiant soul,

> "Uprose the merry Sphinx,
> And couched no more in stone;
> She melted into purple cloud,
> She silvered in the moon;
> She spired into a yellow flame;
> She flowered in blossom red;
> She flowed into a foaming wave;
> She stood Monadnoc's head.
>
> "Through a thousand voices
> Spoke the universal dame;
> 'Who telleth me one of my meanings
> Is master of all I am.'"

Clothed eternity is Emerson's own expression for man — an expression which implied for him at least nothing less than personal immortality. Presenting the same idea in other terms, he wrote in his old age: "As I stand over the gloom and deep of the Future, and consider earnestly what it forebodes, I cannot dismiss my joyful auguries. I will not and cannot see in it a fiction or a dream. It is reality arriving. It is to me an oracle that I cannot bring myself to undervalue. It is the temple of the highest." By these words Emerson did not mean that he thought of the soul as translated after the agony of physical death to some

distant region where it would find unending happiness in a realm called Heaven. He rather believed that the spirit, outliving the dissolution of the body, would know an existence beyond the power of the mind of mortal man to comprehend. As he looked forth into that world, he had no such vision of the reunion of souls as comforted Bryant, or was longed for by Poe. As he had felt himself unable to phrase a satisfactory definition of God, so he as little felt himself able to write a circumstantial definition of heaven. He had but little sympathy with the highly wrought picture in the Apocalypse of Saint John; far truer to his mind were the words of Saint Paul, " Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

And this faith was the more sure, because he had reached it, not by the road of an intellectual process, but by a path which led through the valley of the shadow of death. Early in 1842 he lost his eldest child, his first born son. After one outburst of passionate grief, he became mute in his sorrow for a time; yet at length he came to feel, as Tennyson recalling the loss of his friend Arthur Hallam was even at the same time feeling, that " for the unquiet heart and brain a use in measured language lies." In his *Threnody*, the American poet bewailed

"The hyacinthine boy, for whom
Morn well might break and April bloom,
The gracious boy, who did adorn
The world whereunto he was born,
And by his countenance repay
The favor of the loving Day."

In the earlier parts of the poem there are frequent alternations between a mood marked by the longing cry which bitter suffering forced from the unhappy father's lips, and a calmer state of mind which deep reflection brought him. Later, we find that Emerson reached perfect poise in the thought that what is lost in God is in God-head found. Never was he more confident than when he wrote,

"Wilt thou not ope thy heart to know
What rainbows teach, and sunsets show?
Verdict which accumulates
From lengthening scroll of human fates,
Voice of earth to earth returned,
Prayers of saints that inly burned —
Saying, *What is excellent,*
As God lives, is permanent;
Hearts are dust, hearts' love remains
Heart's love will meet thee again."

The philosophy and the religion of Emerson received a great deal of adverse criticism during his lifetime, nor have they yet ceased to be targets for many a flying shaft. In all the years, however, there has scarcely a single arrow of contempt or ridicule or spite been aimed at Emerson himself. More than once it happened when he was on his lecturing tours that one who came to scoff remained,

in a very literal sense, to pray. Ministers who felt that they could not invite him to address their people, openly spoke of him as an example to their flock. The severest critic of Emerson the thinker, had nothing but the highest praise for Emerson the man. Never perhaps has there been another case of a man whose teachings have been so sharply assailed but who himself has been so generously protected. Reverence is none too strong a word to use in characterizing the attitude which many held towards Emerson in his lifetime, nor is there need to change that epithet today. A certain dignity, a certain self-respect, a certain self-confidence marked the man. Unconsciously, for though self-reliant he was never egotistical, Emerson drew his own portrait in the lines to which he gave the name *Character:* —

> " The sun set, but set not his hope:
> Stars rose; his faith was earlier up:
> Fixed on the enormous galaxy,
> Deeper and older seemed his eye;
> And matched his sufferance sublime
> The taciturnity of time.
> He spoke, and words more soft than vain
> Brought the Age of Gold again:
> His actions won such reverence sweet
> As hid all measure of the feat."

Surely it is not too much to say of such a man that he was the noble embodiment of his own religion. So thought those who knew him best, so thought Oliver Wendell Holmes when, summing up the life and conduct of his friend, he well said for all of us:

" His creed was a brief one, but he carried it everywhere with him. In all he did, in all he said, and, so far as outward signs could show, in all his thoughts, the indwelling Spirit was his light and guide; through all nature he looked up to nature's God; and if he did not worship the man Christ Jesus, as the churches of Christendom have done, he followed His footsteps so nearly that our good Methodist, Father Taylor, spoke of him as more like Christ than any man he had known."

V

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

In making a study of the religious teachings of American poets, one passes quite readily from Emerson to Whittier. The two men were in agreement upon a strikingly large number of fundamental beliefs, despite the popular opinion that a pantheist and a Quaker could have but few spiritual ideas in common. The Over-Soul of Emerson is hardly distinguishable from the Over-Heart of Whittier; the voice-within of one is the inner-light of the other; and Nature as a direct utterance of God received equal recognition from both. If Concord was taught by Emerson in *Each and All* that "all are needed by each one," that "nothing is fair or good alone"; Amesbury was as plainly told by Whittier in *The Quaker of Olden Time* that "each man's life affects the spiritual life of all, and in *The Meeting* that

> "Dissevered from the suffering whole,
> Love hath no power to save a soul."

The Sphinx, moreover, addressed her awful inquiry into the meaning of life no less to Whittier than to Emerson; and, although the latter found the solution to be that all is God, and the former that God is good, the questioner was put to flight in either case, for, as she herself acknowledged, whoever tells

one of her meanings is master of them all. Again, if Emerson in a sense destroyed the divinity of Christ by making all men equally divine with Jesus of Galilee, Whittier at least minimized the importance of the historic life of the Nazarene, to emphasize the fact that every true believer may each day find within his own heart the gracious Lord reborn.

Closely similar as the conclusion of Emerson and Whittier were, however, the two poets made and still make their appeal to entirely different elements in our human nature. We admire Emerson, we love Whittier; we assent to the former, we feel with the latter; we learn from the one that we are the offspring of God, we know with the other that we are all children of one Heavenly Father. In other words, Emerson was the more philosophic, Whittier the more religious. Far removed from what may not unjustly be termed the indifferentism of Poe and possibly of Whitman, the Quaker writer, in his Christian mysticism passed beyond the calm intellectuality of Emerson and even transcended the ethical nobility of Bryant, Longfellow, Holmes, and Lowell, singers of faith and hope though they undoubtedly were. Indeed, it may well be asserted at this point that Whittier differed from his fellow-poets in one exceedingly important point: to them religion was a theory of life variously apprehended, to him religion was life itself. In a very true and peculiar sense, Whittier walked daily with his Master, even Christ, thus renewing in the nineteenth century, the spiritual

faith and worship of those enthusiasts who five hundred years before had in all reverence called themselves the Friends of God.

Born of Quaker parents, Whittier in childhood adopted the faith of his fathers and held to it throughout his life. Exactly what that faith was, it is perhaps impossible to define, for even Whittier himself in *The Preacher* spoke of a representative member of the Society of Friends as "barren of rite and vague of creed." Still, an attentive reader of *The Pennsylvania Pilgrim* and many allied poems can discern that the Quakers were, as they are now, easily distinguishable from their neighbors by a marked simplicity of dress, manner, and speech; by an earnest desire to live at peace with all men; and by a policy of non-resistance, suffer though they might from war or persecution. From the same source one learns also that the Friends asserting that all men are equal before God dispense with an ordained ministry, since they believe that no one should speak save as he is prompted by the Divine Spirit stirring within his own soul. Such inspiration failing, the stillness of their assembly often remains wholly unbroken, for the Quaker holds the act of worship complete and sufficient, though it takes no other form than meditative communion with Eternal Mind. Such was the form of worship of which Whittier wrote in the poem last mentioned, —

> "Lowly before the Unseen Presence knelt
> Each waiting heart, till haply some one felt
> On his moved lips the seal of silence melt.

"Or, without spoken words, low breathings stole
Of a diviner life from soul to soul,
Baptizing in one tender thought the whole.

. . . . . .

"For soul touched soul; the spiritual treasure-trove
Made all men equal, none could rise above
Nor sink below that level of God's love."

All things considered, it is perhaps safe to assume that the essential difference between the Friends and other religious bodies is found in the stress placed by the Quakers upon the trustworthiness of a compelling voice which speaks from within. According to Whittier's unusually clear definition of the triune God, this voice is no other than the Holy Spirit. "God is one," he wrote, "just, holy, merciful, eternal, and almighty, Creator, Father of all things; Christ, the same eternal One, manifested in our Humanity and in Time; and the Holy Spirit, the same Christ, manifested within us, the Divine Teacher, the Living Word, the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." To the test of this divine Light the Quaker subjected every act and thought of his life. "Within himself" says Whittier in *The Pennsylvania Pilgrim* "the Friend found the law of right." To him, the unpardonable sin was no other than the denial of the Word of God within his own heart. Guided by that voice, therefore, he worked out his salvation like the child spoken of in *Help*,

"Still listening, through the noise of time and sense,
To the still whisper of the Inward Word;
Bitter in blame, sweet in approval heard,
Itself its own confirming evidence:
To health of soul a voice to cheer and please,
To guilt the wrath of the Eumenides."

Happy, thrice happy indeed were souls like William Forster who "walked the dark world in the mild, still guidance of the Light" or like Barclay of Ury whose "inward ear over the rabble's laughter angel whisperings could hear," or like Francis Pastorius, the Pennsylvania Pilgrim,

"Through whose veiled, mystic faith the Inward Light,
Steady and still, an easy brightness, shone,
Transfiguring all things in its radiance white."

Settled conviction that the Inner Light was denied to no man, or, in other words, that at no period and in no nation has God left himself without witnesses, the Quaker, despite the narrowness of his creed when he thought only of himself, was as broad as the whole earth in his charity when he turned to look upon his fellow-men. To him spiritual democracy was a very real fact indeed, and every man therefore was free to worship as the light within himself revealed. In Whittier especially did this Quaker belief in the equality of all men before God reach full flower. Assuming, as he himself once said, that the most fitting expression for the Inner Light, the root idea of Quakerism, may be found in the word Immanuel, God with us, he shrank from asserting, much more from believing, that all truth is in the possession of

one age, nation, or sect. His view was wider. He saw, as he wrote in *The Quaker Alumni*, that —

> " The Word which the reason of Plato discerned;
> The Truth, as whose symbol the Mithra-fire burned;
> The soul of the world which the Stoic but guessed,
> In the Light Universal, the Quaker confessed! "

Thus regarding all men, whenever and wherever born, as the children of one loving Father and as having some share of the mystic Word, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, Whittier looked for the salvation of the Jew, the barbarian, and the heretic; and spoke with no grudging respect of the faith of the Romanist, the Churchman, and the Calvinist. True, he admitted the possibility of the perpetual loss of the soul that persistently turns away from God; but theological argument had little attraction for him, and " his human hands," he said, more than once, " were weak to hold the iron-bound creeds." To those who urged it upon him as a duty to insist upon the justice and the wrath of God, he could only reply that whoever hears and obeys the Inner Voice may without question trust himself to the Divine Love of the Eternal Goodness.

Belief in the possibility of a mystic communion with the Holy Spirit did not end for Whittier in the establishment of a theoretical democracy of souls. His religion if anything at all, was intensely practical. Sunday might appropriately be regarded as a time for special worship, but activity in the service of God was not to be forgotten on

other days of the week. One might not sit too hastily in judgment upon his fellow-men, for their conduct might have been commanded by the voice of the Spirit; but when a man had obviously permitted his own passions or desires to deafen the ear of his soul, then must he be told his error in no uncertain terms. One's country was to be loved, the franchise was to be looked upon with respect, but a nation might fall into sin and deserve the castigation of any man whose own hands were clean, whose own heart was pure. Not willingly did Whittier take up his great work of reform; but whither the monitions of the spirit commanded, he dared not refuse to walk. In his young manhood he saw his country fallen upon evil ways. His duty was clear before him and that duty he unhesitatingly performed. Wherever he saw an ailing spot, he placed his finger upon it; whatever worthy cause needed his support, he helped. His voice was heard in season and out of season; he made no distinction on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude; he was no respecter of persons.

In *A Summons* he uttered his indignation at the adoption of Pinckney's Resolutions in the House of Representatives; in *To a Southern Statesman,* he expressed his disgust at the two-faced policy of Calhoun; and in *Ichabod* he sternly rebuked so great a man as Webster for his notorious Seventh of March speech. Societies of one kind and another, associations of clergymen, and bodies of legislature heard his voice. If that voice was at

times as of one crying in the wilderness, it none the less firmly called to repentance, and gave warning that the time was at hand for a thorough cleansing of the threshing floor. He deplored in retrospect the persecution during colonial times of men and women upon the charge of witchcraft or of membership in some unpopular religious sect; he could find no place for patience with the injustice that had been measured out to the Indian; and he bitterly denounced the inhuman ill-treatment that in his own day was being visited upon the negro. Capital punishment he looked upon as judicial murder; imprisonment of any sane man other than a criminal, as an infringement of the God-given right of freedom; and slavery as quite the most heinous of social crimes. He would have no man bound in any way save at the command of the Inner Light of the man himself; but woe unto the man who having ears to hear heard not the voice of the Spirit, or hearing did not openly take his stand for justice and truth.

When slavery came to an end, and the many attendant evils were quelled, Whittier was at liberty to lay aside his active work of public reform. He could then turn from the composition of such verses as *Stanzas for the Times*, *Clerical Oppressors*, and *Official Piety*, to devote himself once more to the writing of songs much more congenial to his heart. That indignation frequently makes very good verses indeed, Thomas Carlyle long ago pointed out, yet one can hardly assert that Whittier's *Anti-Slavery Poems* or his *Songs of Labor and*

Reform contain much work of real poetic value. Those verses were written for a particular purpose, and they nobly served that purpose; but save as an influence in history, they need not now be remembered. That many were the practical expression of Whittier's deep religious feeling is evident, yet hardly a line of them can be quoted in this day and generation to strengthen the feeble knees, to comfort the sin-sick soul, or to bind up the broken-hearted. For such purposes, recourse must rather be had to work which, although it makes no strong appeal to the writer of history, is none the less of much importance to any man who finds an interest in religious thought.

Things spiritual, it is popularly assumed, have their ultimate source in the Bible. Whittier strongly dissented from this opinion, maintaining that the only possible final authority is the living omnipresent spirit of God. "The Scriptures," he once wrote, "are *a* rule, not *the* rule of faith and practice . . . the reason of our obedience to which, is mainly that we find in them the eternal precepts of the Divine Spirit declared and repeated, to which our conscience bears witness. . . . We believe in the Scriptures because they repeat the warnings and admonitions and promises of the indwelling Light and Truth, because we find the law and prophets in our own souls." In other words, Whittier, like his own colonial hero Pastorius, insisted upon interpreting his Bible by the Inward Light. Whatever he found there, must, to gain his assent, have in some way squared itself to the

standard of that inward monitor. That the Scriptures as a whole did so square themselves in Whittier's mind, his poetry repeatedly bears witness. For the most part he seems to have accepted quite literally whatever he read in Holy Writ. The value which he placed upon the Scriptures is no doubt expressed in *The Vaudois Teacher* by the peddlar who spoke of them as —

> " A wonderful pearl of exceeding price, whose virtue shall not decay,
> Whose light shall be as a spell to thee and a blessing on thy way! "

Certainly Whittier knew the contents of his Bible as few other poets in modern times have known it. The most obscure names and incidents in Hebrew history came readily to his mind; allusions to men and places of sacred Palestine abound in his writings, and his very diction betrays the fact that the Bible for years must have been his daily companion. How thoroughly Whittier made the events related in the Scriptures a part of his mental equipment, a single extract from *Mogg Megone*, although by no means an isolated example, sufficiently shows: —

> " Came, softly blending, on my ear
> With the low tones I loved to hear:
> Tales of the pure, the good, the wise,
> The holy men and maids of old,
> In the all-sacred pages told;
> Of Rachel, stooped at Haran's fountains,
> Amid her father's thirsty flock,
> Beautiful to her kinsman seeming
> As the bright angels of his dreaming,

On Padan-aran's holy rock;
Of gentle Ruth, and her who kept
Her awful vigil on the mountains,
By Israel's virgin daughters wept;
Of Miriam, with her maidens, singing
The song for grateful Israel meet,
While every crimson wave was bringing
The spoils of Egypt at her feet;
Of her, Samaria's humble daughter,
Who paused to hear, beside her well,
Lessons of love and truth, which fell
Softly as Shiloh's flowing water;
And saw, beneath his pilgrim guise,
The Promised One, so long foretold
By holy seer and bard of old,
Revealed before her wondering eyes!"

To Whittier the Bible, well as he knew it, much as he loved it, was not in itself a revelation of God, rather was it the record of such a revelation. Viewed in that light, it needs at times much explanation; and this explanation Whittier found not in theological commentary nor in scholarly treatise, but in what he saw with his eyes and heard with his ears. In *A Sabbath Scene*, he went so far as to say, "I heard the written word interpreted by nature" and in *Trinitas* he recorded the story of an incident upon the street which helped him to solve the riddle of how Three are One and One is Three. Leaving his door one morning with that question upon his lips, he observed first of all as he went on his way that sun, air, and rain are bestowed alike upon the good and the evil, the foul and the fair; later in the day he saw by chance a stainless woman pause to speak a word of help and

comfort to a fallen sister of the streets; and still later, as he passed a haunt of sin, his soul prompted the thought, how shall heaven be carried to these lost souls? Returning homeward, his morning's question still unanswered, he strove to find the solution in the writings of Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin, but none yielded him a satisfactory reply. Closing his books, his desire unappeased, he suddenly found the mystery become clear; a rebuking whisper spoke within his soul,

> " O blind of sight, of faith how small!
> Father, and Son, and Holy Call;
> This day thou hast denied them all!
>
> " Revealed in love and sacrifice,
> The Holiest passed before thine eyes,
> One and the same, in threefold guise,
>
> " The equal Father in rain and sun,
> His Christ in the good to evil done,
> His Voice in thy soul;—and the Three are One! "

Like the Hebrew writers Whittier found his chief proof of God in Nature. With such passages from the Scriptures as call attention to the fact that the young lions seek their meat from God, that the earth trembles at the presence of the Lord, and that the firmament showeth His handiwork, one need not hesitate to compare a noticeably large number of quotations from the Quaker poet. Again, beside that Psalm which summons every created thing to praise the name of the Lord, one may properly place the early lines of the poem entitled, — *The Worship of Nature*,

"The harp at Nature's advent strung
Has never ceased to play;
The song the stars of morning sung
Has never died away.

"And prayer is made, and praise is given,
By all things near and far;
The ocean looketh up to heaven
And mirrors every star."

Plainly Nature at all times spoke to Whittier of God. Convinced that she never hints in vain, nor prophesies amiss, he sought and found the spiritual fact behind her every sign and symbol. In reddening dawn, in warm noon-lights, in sunset gold, he watched God's angels come and go; on sky and mountain wall he saw the Almighty's pictures hang; the sky to him was the hollow of God's hand, the lake the mirror of His love; the stars His teachers; the hills, the streams, the woods, His witnesses. In winter, in spring, in summer, turn where he would, the poet saw God about him, "and when," as he wrote in *The Pennsylvania Pilgrim*,

"And when the miracle of autumn came,
And all the woods with many colored flame
Of splendor, making summer's greenness tame,

"Burned, unconsumed, a voice without a sound
Spake to him from each kindled bush around,
And made the strange, new landscape holy ground!"

Although Nature daily led Whittier into direct communion with God, the poet was never able to accept the doctrines which with Emerson looked

at least in the direction of pantheism. The Quaker held to the theistic principle that the external world, although God is undoubtedly immanent within it, is, like man, something apart from Divine Personality. Nevertheless, not even at rare intervals, did Whittier fall into the colder, though not necessarily less devout attitude of the scientist. He cared little for the principles discovered or the theories formulated by the physicist and the chemist; he preferred to see Nature undissected, unlabelled, unanalyzed, untabulated. A devoted friend of Agassiz, he could write, " I have no fear of anything that science finds in searching through material things." Unhesitatingly accepting the geologist's discoveries with many of their implications, he could, after all had been said, fall back upon the belief that " the sandstone none the less was woven with threads of rain from God's design." To him, the Divine Creator was ever at work in his world. The yearly repetition of spring and summer, autumn and winter, the regular succession of flowers and fruit and seed, did not by their familiarity make the mysterious power of God seem to him the less wondrous and sublime. The miracle of life remained, the miracle of grass and bush and tree. The scientist might point out a relation of cause and effect, might enunciate a law; but the statement, the conclusion was no more than evidence that man had become possessed of a little deeper insight into the methods of the Maker and Preserver of the world. To Whittier whatever science had to say, the changes in Nature

were no less miraculous than they were on that first day of creation when the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

Much, however, as Whittier loved Nature, deep as were the lessons which she taught him, he could not regard her as the final teacher of truth. He might point out in the lines *To Avis Keene* that Nature in every one of her moods utters some message of divinity, he might remark in *A Summer Pilgrimage* that our common earth is holy ground, and that all things which we look upon are but shadows of God's realities; yet he saw clearly that Nature by herself can give no sufficient solution to the mystery which surrounds us. To one who turns unsatisfied from the creeds and the ceremonials of the churches, and hopes to find truth and peace and rest in communion with Nature, Whittier felt compelled to utter a word of warning. " True," he wrote in a poem sent with a copy of Woolman's *Journal*, —

> " True, to thee an answer cometh
> From the earth and from the sky,
> And to thee the hills and waters
> And the stars reply.
>
> " But a soul-sufficing answer
> Hath no outward origin;
> More than Nature's many voices
> May be heard within."

Man, Whittier ever felt, man to whom the Holy Spirit speaks directly, is far more than his abode, his inward life far more than the raiment in which Nature clothes herself. Much, the poet admitted,

had been taught him by the warm sky, the sundown-tinted hill, the forest, and the lake; but his soul reacted upon the knowledge thus obtained and he learned, as the hero of *The Branded Hand* had learned,

> " A higher wisdom than the babbling schoolmen know;
> God's stars and silence taught him, as His angels only can,
> That the one sole sacred thing beneath the cope of heaven is
> Man! "

Whittier of course understood the point of view of those scientists and philosophers who maintain that mankind is a part of Nature, but he could never bring himself to classify humanity with sticks and stones or with the beasts that perish. He was ready to assume, as has already been pointed out, that man, like Nature, is something apart from Divine Personality but he plainly held that mankind transcends Nature in a way not unanalogous to that in which mankind is itself transcended by God. Man, he did not forget, can lay his hand upon all the forces of Nature and bend them to his will, can harness the wild beast and make him tame, can even perversely use his God-like powers to place his fellowman beneath the yoke. Endowed with free-will he can make his own choice between good and evil; self-conscious, self-determining, he is endowed with personality as is no other being save God alone. Misusing his power, he sins; but never, Whittier insisted, can he wholly lose his God-like character. The poet in his outlook here may well be compared with his friend

Joseph Sturge who, as Whittier wrote in *In Remembrance*, —

> " in the vilest saw
> Some sacred crypt or altar of a temple
> Still vocal with God's law;
> And heard with tender ear the spirit sighing
> As from its prison cell,
> Praying for pity, like the mournful crying
> Of Jonah out of hell."

Thus regarded, Man, no less than Nature taught Whittier lessons of God. Beneath all the sorrow, evil, and sin of this world, he penetrated to the infinite worth of man; and testing his conclusions by the still small voice within, he found himself, as in *The Hermit of the Thebaid*, near to the feet of God,

> " For man the living temple is:
> The mercy-seat and cherubim,
> And all the holy mysteries,
> He bears with him."

Among men Whittier found Jesus of Nazareth, a man exceeding every man; but though a man, yet not the less a being through whom God uniquely and miraculously made Himself manifest— a new revelation, as he wrote in *Our Master*, of the Eternal in time — humanity clothed in the brightness of the Father, —

> " Most human and yet most divine,
> The flower of man and God."

Against the recorded events in the three and thirty years of that mysterious life in Galilee, Whittier never raised a doubt. The immaculate birth, the miracles at Cana, in Samaria, and at Bethany;

the resurrection, the appearance to the twelve, and the ascension into heaven, all unquestioned, have their place in the poetry of Whittier. Very real indeed to him were all those wondrous events, yet not so real nor so wonderful that in his contemplation of them he failed to see the Christ who walked beside him day by day. The Christ of history he knew, if we base our conclusions upon a further study of the poem last mentioned, is no more upon earth,

> " He cometh not a king to reign;
> The world's long hope is dim;
> The weary centuries watch in vain
> The clouds of Heaven for Him.
>
> " Nor holy bread, nor blood of grape,
> His lineaments restore
> Of Him we know in outward shape
> And in the flesh no more."

Nevertheless, Whittier firmly believed that this Christ though dead yet speaketh; though crucified, yet liveth.

> " For warm, sweet, tender, even yet
> A present help is He;
> And faith has still its Olivet
> And love its Galilee.
>
> " The healing of His seamless dress
> Is by our beds of pain;
> We touch him in life's throng and press,
> And we are whole again."

The poet of course could not say with the beloved disciple, " that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked

upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life, declare we unto you," but he could and did speak out of the fullness of an intimate daily companionship with Him in the Spirit. Believing, as he wrote in *The Men of Old* "that the church, sceptic at heart, had read with but slow and reluctant eye the lessons of its Head," Whittier thought not of the Holy Land, but of the daily need as redolent of Him. Christ's living presence was in the bound and bleeding slave; was scourged and crucified in the blameless poor, was revealed in every kind and loving act. "The Voice," the poet said, "that spoke in Nazareth still speaks, the sound thereof hath never died. In one's suffering brother the Lord is found and not descending from the clouds." Not the dead but the living Christ was the mighty fact in Whittier's religious belief. His spirit, the poet insisted in *Our Master*, as Eternal Love remains.

"And not for signs in heaven above
Or earth below they look,
Who know with John His smile of love,
With Peter His rebuke.

"We may not climb the heavenly steeps
To bring the Lord Christ down:
In vain we search the lowest deeps,
For Him no depths can drown.

"In joy of inward peace, or sense
Of sorrow over sin,
He is His own best evidence,
His witness is within."

Although the stanzas just quoted make direct

mention of Christ, they end with a statement which immediately recalls to the reader's mind Whittier's conception of the Holy Ghost as the Inner Light. The poet's thought, indeed, wherever it started, by whatever path it travelled, arrived eventually at that one goal, at that one central fact. It would be misleading, no doubt, to assert that Whittier had a greater trust in the Third Person of the Trinity than he had in the First, and it would certainly be an error to maintain that he in any way minimized the saying of Jesus, "No man cometh to the Father but by me." Still it must be admitted that his confidence in the Inner Light was supreme. The fact is, Whittier accepted quite literally and put to very practical use the promise which Jesus made to His disciples in His last conference with them before His crucifixion: "I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth. . . . And the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, he shall be in you, and shall teach you all things, . . . and will guide you into all truth." Never doubting that this promise had been completely fulfilled for those to whom it was immediately made, and was indeed still being fulfilled for their successors in his own time, Whittier brought to the Voice within for its approval or disapproval every conclusion which he drew from an attentive reading of the Bible, from a close observation of Nature, from an intimate knowledge of man, and from a devout contemplation of the life and work of Christ as the Redeemer

of the World. Of the conclusions thus tested and thus divinely sanctioned there take prominent places: the goodness of God, the abiding power of faith and love; and the steadfast hope of immortality.

In the mind of Whittier, God seems rarely, if ever, to have been associated with any image of terror, indignation, or wrath. He is never pictured by the poet as a God of anger wreaking vengeance upon a wicked and perverse generation, but always as a God of tenderness, mercy, and pity. Though Whittier saw that pain and grief must have their place in the life of man, that the daily wine-press must be trod, he firmly held that the All-knowing Father careth for His children in their need. Chasten and rebuke them He may for their waywardness and sin, yet His ear is ever open to their cries. In His good time and in His own best way, He hears and answers all their prayers. "God is," the poet wrote, "and all is well." He is, in the words of the poem *At Eventide*,

> "Eternal Good which overlies
> The sorrow of the world, Love which outlives
> All sin and wrong, Compassion which forgives
> To the uttermost, and Justice whose clear eyes
> Through lapse and failure look to the intent,
> And judge our frailty by the life we meant."

This sense of loving Fatherhood and this child-like trust in the Infinite Goodness may stand as a summary of Whittier's abiding faith in God. Again and again does the thought find expression

in the poems. In *Italy* he dwells upon the righteousness of God whereby the children of the light shall tread at last the darkness under foot; in the lines called *In Quest*, he is confident that the riddle of the world is clear to those who feel that God is good; in *The Waiting* he asserts that let come what may, be loss or gain our lot, God will somehow, sometime, somewhere make the balance good. Turn the pages of Whittier's poetry as one will, this insistence upon the goodness of God is everywhere. It is in *The Pennsylvania Pilgrim*, in *The Last Walk in Autumn*, in *Cassandra Southwick*, in *Rabbi Ishmael*, in *The Shadow and the Light*. It is the animating impulse of whole collections of poems gathered under some spiritual headings. It may indeed be regarded as a fundamental thought of the Quaker poet's life. Certainly it is the informing thought which made possible the simple perfection of that intensely personal poem *The Eternal Goodness*. There Whittier reiterated his fixed trust that God is good. "I know not of His hate," he wrote, "I know only His goodness and His love.

"I know not what the future hath
Of marvel or surprise,
Assured alone that life and death
His mercy underlies.

"And so beside the Silent Sea
I wait the muffled oar;
No harm from Him can come to me
On ocean or on shore.

> " I know not where His islands lift
> Their fronded palms in air;
> I only know I cannot drift
> Beyond His love and care."

So confident was Whittier of the goodness of God, so willing to lean his human heart upon the pitying bosom of his Lord, he felt no fear, no terror at the thought of being called before the judgment seat. To God, it was Whittier's belief, all His creatures appear as they really are; and He seeth not as man seeth; His way is not our way, a thought found in so early a poem as *Funeral Tree of the Sokokis,* and again much later in *The Pressed Gentian.* Both are here laid under contribution:—

> " And Nature's God to whom alone
> The secret of the heart is known, —
>
> . . . . . .
>
> " Not with our partial eye shall scan,
> Not with our pride and scorn will ban.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> " Man judges from a partial view,
> Man never yet his brother knew;
> The Eternal Eye that sees the whole
> May better read the darkened soul,
> And find, to outward sense denied,
> The flower upon its inmost side! "

Assured by the Spirit of this omniscience in his Heavenly Father, assured likewise that beyond that Father's judgment, His mercy would endure, Whittier felt that he well might pray with the psalmist of old, " Thy hand not man's on mine be laid." Man, the poet saw, may be hate and earth

may frown below, yet no less he was sure that Heaven weeps on high and God is always love.

Whittier fully assured of the infinite mercy of God, dared hope at times in every soul's ultimate salvation. "Can Heaven itself be Heaven," he asked, "and look unmoved on Hell?" have souls redeemed no share in the sorrow of God over the wayward and the lost? has faith no work to do, and love no prayer to make as the cries of those in torment assail the gates of Heaven and sadden those within? Rejecting the harsh doctrine of old time that the sufferings of the wicked in their agony and pain sweeten and increase the joys of those who are at peace, he pictures in *The Two Angels*, the God of Light as sending forth from the heavenly host the two nearest of his attendants, Pity, the most tender, and Love, the most dear, to bear a message of consolation and hope to the souls that fill the under realm.

"The way was strange, the flight was long; at last the angels came
Where swung the lost and nether world; red-wrapped in rayless flame.

"There Pity, shuddering, wept; but Love, with faith too strong for fear,
Took heart from God's almightiness and smiled a smile of cheer.

"And lo! that tear of Pity quenched the flame whereon it fell,
And, with the sunshine of that smile, hope entered into Hell!"

Convinced, however, as Whittier was, of the goodness, the gentleness, the tenderness of God, he knew the nature of man too well to deny the possibility of the complete loss of the soul which persistently stops its ears to the gracious pleading of the Lord. "I may believe," he once wrote in a letter, "that the Divine Love and Compassion follow us in all worlds and that the Heavenly Father will do the best that is possible for every creature He has made; but believing that man is endowed with free will and that therefore he has within his own hand the making of his life both here and hereafter, I can but feel at times that Heaven beholding man's unthankfulness may at last wholly lose Its patience and Its love." Thus believing, Whittier occasionally found the thought obtruding itself upon him that, as a poet, a teacher of men, a bearer of a message, he had perhaps too persistently dwelt upon the kindly pity of the everlasting goodness. At least once, in *The Answer*, he undertook to sound the note of warning to presumptuous souls. To those who say that the present shall be theirs alone and duty may be laid aside until a more convenient season, he uttered the stern rebuke "Tomorrow is with God alone, and man hath but to-day." Still Whittier never represented God as turning away from perverse and willful man; rather he threw the responsibility of loss upon man himself. It rests with him having ears to hear, whether he will obey the voice of the Spirit.

"Forever round the Mercy-seat
The guiding lights of Love shall burn;
But what if, habit-bound, thy feet
Shall lack the will to turn?

"Say not, thy fond, vain heart within,
The Father's arm shall still be wide,
When from these pleasant ways of sin
Thou turn'st at eventide.

"Though God be good, and free be heaven,
No force divine can love compel;
And, though the song of sins forgiven
May sound through lowest hell,

"The sweet persuasion of His voice
Respects thy sanctity of will.
He giveth day: thou hast thy choice
To walk in darkness still."

Man, then, according to Whittier, has a duty to perform, and leaving it undone, he may commit the sin which is even unto death. If he would save his soul alive, if he would escape as the bird out of the snare of the fowler, he must be alert to every command of God, he must follow Truth wherever it may lead, he must utter the message divinely placed upon his lips. Be the cost what it may, "simple duty," said Whittier, "has no place for fear, since our task is truly accomplished only when we work in unison with God's great thought and thus hasten on the day when God and man shall speak as one." But man, the poet saw and once recorded in *The Reward*, is frail and prone to sin.

" Alas! the evil which we fain would shun
We do, and leave the wished-for good undone:
Our strength to-day
Is but to-morrow's weakness, prone to fall;
Poor, blind, unprofitable servants all
Are we alway.

" Who bears no trace of passion's evil force?
Who shuns thy sting, O terrible Remorse?
Who does not cast
On the thronged pages of his memory's book,
At times, a sad and half-reluctant look,
Regretful of the past? "

Pride, vain-glory, and hypocrisy beset us to-day, the poet knew, no less than they did our fathers before us. We gloss over our own faults, striving to transform them into virtues; we dare to sit in judgment upon our fellow-men, dare to undertake to pluck the mote out of our brother's eye, forgetting the beam that is in our own. And thus we fall into sin, even as did John Underhill of whom Whittier wrote,

" But the heart is deceitful, the good Book saith,
And life hath ever a savor of death.
Through hymns of triumph the tempter calls,
And whoso thinketh he standeth, falls."

Frail as man is, however, there are, so Whittier thought, a few noble spirits who fight the good fight, who run the race, who are not disobedient to the heavenly vision. " Life," said he, " hath its royal natures yet, true, tender, brave, and sweet." These, he held, have the power to interpret the oracles of God more clearly than do most of us, and

we, knowing them by their fruits to be truly of the Kingdom, may well read with earnest hearts the lesson of their lives. Doubt, they taught Whittier, comes forth from the source of all evil, disbelief in the goodness of God is devil-born, sin against man on earth is sin against our Father in Heaven, " no wrong by wrong is righted, and only hate can come of hating." But their teaching is positive as well as negative: Love will come of love; he who like Burns sings the love of man, hath sung the love of God; mercy and help extended to the suffering poor is service rendered to the Master; life saved for one's self is lost, but he who loses life for another's sake holds the light of God's eternal day. That one may be called upon to speak the word of rebuke, none knew better than Whittier, but the anger of such a message-bearer, he saw equally well, is kindled righteously only against the sin, never against the sinner. In all souls, no doubt, is a mingling of good and evil: if then the good, who are never wholly without some spot or blemish, are to be treated charitably, it must not be forgotten that the worst, who are never wholly without some admixture of good, are made in the image of God, have been bought with a price; and however darkened, are still temples of the Holy Ghost. Not yet, Whittier insisted, not yet have these spirits in prison outwearied the patience and the love of God. How then, he asked, shall any man presume to be more just than He who causeth the rain to fall upon the just and the unjust, and his sun to shine upon the evil and the good?

The divinely sanctioned principle that love is the greatest of all the virtues was cardinal with Whittier both as man and as poet. In his daily life he really loved all his friends, as he once said he loved Charles Sumner in particular, "with most unworldly tenderness." In his poems passage after passage appears which might serve as a modern commentary upon a certain famous chapter in the writings of St. Paul, for clearly the charity which Whittier defined and pictured was not less broad than that inculcated by the Apostle to the Gentiles. The poet felt it and extended it towards enemies no less than towards friends; towards those whose religious faith and political views differed widely from his own, as well as towards those who assembled with him in the simple worship of the Quaker meeting house, or who like him fought in one way or another for the abolition of slavery without a final dissolution of the nation. Filled with satisfaction, however, as Whittier must have been with the outcome of the Civil War, not a word did he utter which could be construed as an added burden by any Southern heart. His poem, *To the Thirty-ninth Congress*, called upon that body to refrain from urging a conqueror's terms of shame or insisting upon the bending of suppliant knees. Instead he urged it upon them to summon back the lost and wandering, eagerly forgiving and restoring all.

He might in *Ichabod* express his indignation at the deflection of Daniel Webster, but even there he held himself in restraint; and after many years,

writing upon the same subject in *The Lost Occasion*, he had nothing but gentle words to utter. His sympathy with the Church of Rome, it may be said without offense, was but slight; if in such poems as *To Pius IX*, *The Dream of Pio Nono*, and *From Perugia*, he was denunciatory, he was none the less among the first to insist that indemnification must be made for a convent maliciously destroyed near Boston, and was perhaps quite the earliest in this country to defend the cause of the Irish patriots who seemed to be suffering persecution on account of their religious faith. In *The Vaudois Teacher*, he may seem to have been all but uncharitable in his thought, but in the poem which succeeds it in his collected works, *The Female Martyr*, and in *The Angels of Buena Vista*, written fifteen years later, one finds nothing but approval for a Christ-like deed performed in one case, by a Roman Catholic nun and, in the other, by laywomen of the same faith and order. For Protestantism, it is needless to deny, his appreciation was naturally much stronger than for Romanism; and we must admit that for those within his own communion his love and charity were most marked.

The theologian may contend that when we translate a certain passage in Saint Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, "Love suffereth long and is kind," we have not essentially changed the meaning of the older reading. The heart of man knows better. Scholarship has never had the power to change the denotation of a word or to lessen its connotation. Love is ever greater than charity.

Charity indeed may be far-reaching, but one could hardly write of that virtue as Whittier wrote of love in *The Rock-Tomb of Bragdore:*

> " God's love and man's are here.
> And love where'er it goes
> Makes its own atmosphere;
> Its flowers of Paradise
> Take root in the eternal ice,
> And bloom through Polar snows! "

Certainly Whittier had much more in mind than what is commonly understood as charity when he repeatedly insisted that Love is ever miraculous, when he wrote, " a friend loveth at all times and for the evil day thy brother lives," and when in *The Two Rabbis* he pictured the meeting of Nathan and Isaac in the desert,

> " Side by side
> In the low sunshine by the turban stone
> They knelt; each made his brother's woe his own,
> Forgetting, in the agony and stress
> Of pitying love, his claim of selfishness;
> Peace, for his friend besought, his own became;
> His prayers were answered in another's name;
> And when at last they rose up to embrace;
> Each saw God's pardon in his brother's face."

Whittier beyond a doubt fully understood the meaning of the second great commandment, " Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Full as well, also, did he know, that " greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend." Few of us, it is true, are called upon to make such a sacrifice in any literal sense, yet the better part

is not therefore taken away. "Every self-denial, every forgiveness," some old saint once said, "is a little crucifixion of ourselves in the divine image." Whittier was thinking the same thought when he wrote "Love scarce is love that never knows the sunshine of forgiving" and he fell back upon it again in the sonnet called *Requital* and yet again in that entitled *Forgiveness.* In the latter Whittier, recording an experience, unconsciously uttered a rebuke to every man who cherishes at any time a thought of hatred or resentment towards his fellow-men:

"My heart was heavy, for its trust had been
Abused, its kindness answered with foul wrong;
So, turning gloomily from my fellow-men,
One summer Sabbath day I strolled among
The green mounds of the village burial place,
Where, pondering how all human love and hate
Find one sad level; and how, soon or late,
Wronged and wrongdoer, each with meekened face,
And cold hands folded over a still heart,
Pass the green threshold of our common grave,
Whither all footsteps tend, whence none depart,
Awed for myself, and pitying my race,
Our common sorrow, like a mighty wave,
Swept all my pride away, and, trembling, I forgave!"

The first of the Christian virtues is faith and is directed towards God; the greatest is love and has primarily, the Scriptures tell us, to do with one's fellow-men; the third, arising perhaps out of a union of the other two is hope — a virtue which a man may indulge in for himself. In other words, if we so live with our neighbor whom we have seen

as to merit the approval of God whom we have not seen, we may cherish the belief which Whittier himself had in mind when he wrote of Sumner,

> " There is no end for souls like his,
> No night for children of the day! "

This hope of conscious immortality was fundamental with the Quaker poet. To one who would have disputed the matter with him, he replied, " There is no great use in arguing that question. One must feel the truth; you cannot climb to heaven on a syllogism." It is certainly the feeling and not the intellect which is behind the personal poems *Ego, My Soul and I*, and *My Namesake;* in the lines addressed to Oliver Wendell Holmes, to Edmund Clarence Stedman, and to Lydia Maria Child; and in the nature pictures, *The Grave by the Lake*, *The River Path*, and *The Last Eve of Summer*. In these poems and in numbers of others, the fact of some form of immortality is assumed without proof. Vague at times Whittier necessarily was when he treated this matter, vague both in thought and expression, yet he not infrequently permitted himself to speak with full conviction. Perhaps in no moment did he give clearer utterance to his feeling of certainty that we do not wholly die, than when the news reached him of the death of Lucy Hooper, — a young woman, whose early death Whittier seems never to have ceased to mourn. Writing to her mother, he said at the close of his letter, " She is not gone. Her pure affections, her firm intellect, her faith

and love, and simple trust in her Heavenly Father are not lost. She lives still, — a glorified dweller in the same universe with ourselves." A few weeks later the same thought found expression in the lines,

> "Not mine the hope of Indra's son,
> Of slumbering in oblivion's rest,
> Life's myriads blending into one,
> In blank annihilation blest;
> Dust atoms of the infinite,
> Sparks scattered from the central light,
> And winning back through mortal pain
> Their old unconsciousness again.
> No! I have friends in Spirit Land,
> Not shadows in a shadowy band,
> Not others, but themselves are they.
> And still I think of them the same
> As when the Master's summons came;
> Their change, — the holy morn-light breaking
> Upon the dream-worn sleeper waking, —
> A change from twilight into day."

Strong as was Whittier's hope in the personal immortality of the soul, doubts would occasionally present themselves. He admitted in the stanzas entitled *Within the Gates* that over him at times, as he awaited his summons beside the inevitable door, the impenetrable wall of death cast down a shadow of distrust and gloom; he betrayed in *Snowbound* and elsewhere his depression at the thought of his elder sister as having passed beneath the low green tent whose curtain never outward swings, or at that of his friends as having entered upon the unknown way from which no step has

ever yet returned. He could but ask now and then, when no whisper broke the silence, when no token of any kind was seen, "Will the voices of the dead once more greet us, will the shut eyelids ever rise?" He canvassed the evidences which seem to be furnished by omens, trances, and dreams; he even made some investigation, it is said, of the doctrines and the practices of spiritualism, but such proof as he drew from these sources proved so little helpful that he could but express himself, late in life, in lines addressed to Lydia Maria Child, in the words,

> "I feel the unutterable longing,
> The hunger of the heart is mine;
> I reach and grope for hands in darkness,
> My ear grows sharp for voice or sign."

Not through any organ of sense, however, did proof positive come to Whittier. As he wrote in the poem but just now quoted from, "On the lips of all we question, the finger of God's silence lies." Not to his head, therefore, but to his heart; not to his mind but to his feelings did the answer make itself clear. Nature might now and then hint at a resurrection, the blooming of flower and the budding of tree might be symbols and types of our destiny, — the destiny of man; yet Whittier's trust in the Divine Goodness was the real basis of his hope that the soul lives forever. It was that trust indeed which led him, in *Snow-Bound*, to ask in full confidence of an affirmative reply, as he thought of the death of his youngest sister,

"And yet, dear heart! remembering thee,
Am I not richer than of old?
Safe in thy immortality,
What change can reach the wealth I hold?
What chance can mar the pearl and gold
Thy love hath left in trust with me?
And while in life's late afternoon,
Where cool and long the shadows grow,
I walk to meet the night that soon
Shall shape and shadow overflow,
I cannot feel that thou art far,
Since near at hand the angels are;
And when the sunset gates unbar,
Shall I not see thee waiting stand,
And white, against the evening star,
The welcome of thy beckoning hand?"

The very fact that our hearts reach out in yearning was to Whittier an evidence sufficient, for he was certain that God would never mock the hope that He Himself has implanted, nor permit a love which He Himself has prompted, to speak its prayer in vain. Thus confident he still further buttressed his hope by a reason which the most materialistic thinker must admit has no little force. The great principles of the indestructibility of matter and of the conservation of energy he extended to the spiritual world, asking "if the waves of the sea and the dust of the earth remaining unwasted through all their many changes, attest the fixed economy of God, shall the kingly mind not outlive their insensate existence, shall not the God-like energy of thought survive their gross unconsciousness?" The same reasoning he again presented in writing of the death of a friend, "Surely

the Divine economy must be conservative of thee," and yet again in lines inscribed upon a flyleaf of a copy of Longfellow's Poems,

> "Yet howsoever changed or tost,
> Not even a wreath of mist is lost,
> No atom can itself exhaust.
>
> "So shall the soul's superior force
> Live on and run its endless course
> In God's unlimited universe."

Of what the life of the soul is to be after its separation from the body, Whittier's verse is less circumstantial than Bryant's on one hand and less vague than Emerson's on the other. From the belief expressed in *The Quaker Alumni* and in *June on the Merrimac* that the dead rest as do we who still live, in God's unchanging mercy alone, and again from the questions asked in *The Singer*,

> "What to shut eyes has God revealed?
> What hear the ears that death has sealed?
> What undreamed beauty passing show
> Requites the loss of all we know?"

from such belief and from such questions, Whittier passed to a number of possibilities which he regarded as highly probable. He often lingered on the thought that the spirits of the dead are near us and have some knowledge of our joys and sorrows. He liked to feel that their happiness is in some measure dependent upon our loving memory of what they were when they lived with us upon earth. There can be, he insisted, no fearful

change, no sudden wonder, no new revealing. The work which best pleased the soul below, he dared say, in one poem, must be the work above; nor did he hesitate to assert elsewhere that the souls of the living must touch the souls of the dead, since, as he said, "God breaks no thread His hand has spun." It is this confidence which underlies *The Eternal Goodness;* it is this perfect trust which gives strength to the lines called *At Last;* it is this abiding hope which breathes in *Snow Bound.* The sceptic falls to silence, and the proud intellect is humbled before the simple faith which led the Quaker poet to write in the face of proofs advanced by the materialist to show that death ends all,

> "Yet love will dream, and Faith will trust,
> (Since He who knows our need is just),
> That somehow, somewhere meet we must.
> Alas for him who never sees
> The stars shine through his cypress trees!
> Who, hopeless, lays his dead away,
> Nor looks to see the breaking day
> Across the mournful marbles play!
> Who hath not learned, in hours of faith,
> The truth to flesh and sense unknown,
> That Life is ever lord of Death,
> And Love can never lose its own!"

VI

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Among American poets, Longfellow is without doubt the most uniformly ethical. It is true that a noble purpose, an elevated ideal, is never lacking in our greater literature, yet Longfellow more than any other American author gives his readers the impression that his sense of goodness was innate rather than accepted, felt rather than defined. Religiously, there is a dignity in Bryant, a pathos in Poe, a loftiness in Emerson, a tenderness in Whittier, not found in Longfellow; still, if the Cambridge poet is lacking to some degree in his possession of these several qualities, he exhibits in their place, when he turns to the contemplation of the duties and conduct of life, unusual clarity of vision, steadiness of heart, and calmness of soul. Bryant interests us, because the paths which led him to confident hope are likewise open to every other man; Poe appeals to us through the very desperation with which he clung to his wavering faith that God is good; Emerson flatters us by the philosophic tone which he imparts to belief; and Whittier increases our self-respect with his insistence that the Holy Spirit finds a dwelling place in every human heart. Longfellow, however, seldom draws us in any of these ways. The religious

element, so far as it finds expression in his poetry, is not evidential as in Bryant, nor romantic as in Poe, nor intellectual as in Emerson, nor intuitional as in Whittier; rather is it moralistic, vary though it may from the tacit on one hand to the openly didactic on the other.

Longfellow's frank acceptance of his moral call has unfortunately made him the victim at times of much adverse criticism and, in some places, of not a little ridicule. With the rise of the theory that art exists solely for art's sake, war was declared against all poetry which had any evident purpose beyond the giving of mere emotional pleasure. It came to be assumed that a person of real culture and true refinement of taste must have outgrown the poems of Longfellow and must therefore either have left them with other playthings of youth to one's successors in the schoolroom, or have handed them pityingly on to such men and women as were dead in the sin of commonplaceness. In time, however, the reaction set in; and signs are not wanting to show that Longfellow's undeviating ethical sincerity is the very quality which assures him a permanent place in literature. It cannot be allowed, of course, that mere preaching in verse, lofty though the lesson may be, is real poetry from any point of view; still even among didactic poets, some are elected unto honor, some unto dishonor. Truth more often than not is beautiful, and so likewise is goodness; and whenever beautiful goodness and beautiful truth draw to themselves adequately

beautiful expression, poetry, as Keats long ago implied, is the inevitable result.

Of Longfellow's openly didactic poems, the most frequently repeated, no doubt, is *A Psalm of Life.* It has become so familiar, indeed, that we glance at it only to pass it over, or at most to read it without appreciation. That it is not poetry of the highest type may be admitted at the outset; yet the most jaded mind, if it can rid itself of the increment of what others have said, will have some reanswering thrill to many of its noble lines. On the whole, we do not object to being taught, if we are convinced that the teacher speaks as one having real authority. It may be well therefore to refrain from brushing aside too hastily or contemptuously those familiar, unaffected stanzas which frankly point out that "life is real, life is earnest" and rise to a culmination hardly less than scriptural in the lines,

> "Act, act in the living Present!
> Heart within and God o'erhead!"

The mention of *A Psalm of Life* brings to mind other poems fully as well known for their like content and equal purpose. *The Light of Stars,* at the time of its first publication called *A Second Psalm of Life,* speaks the lesson, "Be resolute and calm, be self-possessed and still"; *The Ladder of St. Augustine,* adopting the words of the early church father, bids us rise each day upon the wrecks of yesterday; *Excelsior,* despite the many parodies made upon it, is still capable of enhearten-

ing the bearer of a forlorn hope; *The Builders* inculcates the teaching of the apostle that the body as the temple of God must be made beautiful and clean both within and without; *The Beleaguered City* utters the call to prayer before which the midnight phantoms of doubt depart; and *The Castle Builder*, addressed though it was to a child at play among his blocks, reaches a larger audience with its message,

> "Build on and make thy castles high and fair,
> Rising and reaching upward to the skies;
> Listen to voices in the upper air
> Nor lose thy simple faith in mysteries."

Religiously didactic however as are many of the poems upon which Longfellow's reputation rests, it must not be hastily concluded that in them his ambition found its end. His cherished desire from the beginning of his career seems to have been to produce a noble poem upon the life and influence of Christ. Under the date of November 19, 1849, he wrote in his diary, "And now I long to try a loftier strain, and sublimer Song whose broken melodies have for so many years breathed through my soul in the better hours of life." A second entry made two months later shows that this sublimer song which the poet hoped to compose was to be dramatic in form and to bear the title of *Christus*. Yet even a decade earlier, in the very year of the publication of *Voices of the Night*, his first volume of poems, he was contemplating, we know, a poetic treatment of the heroine Elsie, who

did eventually appear as the central character in *The Golden Legend.* The *Christus* in its entirety was given to the public in 1872, thus bringing to an end a work upon a religious theme which had dominated the author's life for more than thirty years. Nevertheless, the thought which had made so strong an appeal was not even then dismissed from the poet's mind. *Judas Maccabæus,* which immediately followed the earlier work must, beyond a doubt, be regarded as an offshoot of the theme underlying *The Divine Tragedy;* and certainly the links binding the important posthumous fragment *Michael Angelo* to the *Christus* are neither few nor negligible. It is safe to conclude, therefore, that however varied were Longfellow's literary interests, the subject of his great religious poem was ever, in some form or another, before his mind. One critic, indeed, has gone so far as to speak of the theme of the *Christus* as "the flame by night and the pillar of cloud by day which led the poet's mind in all its onward movements." Discount this statement as we may, we can but feel that it rests upon a firm substratum of truth; and we readily agree with the same critic when he goes on to say that Longfellow's resolution "to undertake a long and elaborate poem by the holy name of Christ" was "a most rational and at the same time most satisfactory expression of the poet's personality."

Important, however, as the trilogy of the *Christus* is as an indication of ethical unity in Longfellow's literary life, it gives no far-reaching insight into the

details of his religious belief. A drama, even in the case of a poet like Longfellow, can do hardly more than show the author's bias of mind or inclination of heart. The reader, whatever his suspicion, must assume that the several characters speak in their own person and utter thoughts which are often not their creator's. Still it is of value to recall that we have Longfellow's own record of a desire to show in *The Golden Legend* that "through the darkness and corruption of the Middle Ages ran a bright stream of Faith strong enough for all the exigencies of life and death." Likewise is it well not to forget that though the words of the *Finale* of the *Christus* were put into the mouth of Saint John, they were none the less the expression of Longfellow's own estimate of the essential teachings of Jesus.

> "Poor, sad Humanity
> Through all the dust and heat
> Turns back with bleeding feet,
> By the weary road it came,
> Unto the simple thought
> By the great Master taught,
> And that remaineth still:
> Not he that repeateth the name,
> But he that doeth the will!"

One turns unwillingly from the dramas of Longfellow, since they contain many passages of high quality, for which grandeur is often not too strong a term, and which show at times in both thought and diction an elevation which is not found elsewhere in the poet's work. With equal reluctance

one must pass over with mere mention both the noble rendering of the *Divina Commedia* and the host of minor translations from various languages. Interest in the great religious poem of Dante subtended quite as great an arc in Longfellow's literary career as that marked off by his attraction to the life and abiding influence of Christ; and the mere naming of *The Good Shepherd* from the Spanish, *The Angel and the Child* from the French, *The Children of the Lord's Supper* from the Swedish, *The Statue over the Cathedral Door* from the German, and *The Soul's Complaint against the Body* from the Anglo-Saxon, recalls numbers of other translations which show Longfellow's pronounced and long-continued sympathy with the spiritual thoughts of foreign poets. Still, despite the importance of these English versions of religious poems found in other lands, one hardly dares assume that the point of view found in them was necessarily Longfellow's own. For the same reason one must all but eliminate the considerable number of longer and shorter narrative poems, despite the fact that the rejection of *Evangeline*, *The Song of Hiawatha*, *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, and *Tales of a Wayside Inn* limits one to a study of less than one-half of Longfellow's original non-dramatic poetry. Nevertheless, one is not thereby left without a sufficient body of material to assist him in reaching very definite conclusions regarding Longfellow's most intimate religious convictions. The lyrics of which Longfellow was the author, form no inconsiderable part

of his work either in amount or in value. Still further, the personal thoughts found scattered through his larger works are sure to be rediscovered in his shorter poems, sometimes merely repeated, sometimes developed at large. Finally, it is well to add, these briefer songs are so widely known and so greatly loved that in studying them one often finds himself looking not more into the poet's heart than into his own.

The attentive and reflective reader of Longfellow's shorter poems soon discovers that their author was far from being a poet of evasion as was Holmes pronouncedly in all of his earlier work, and equally as far from being sceptical as Lowell undoubtedly was at intervals. Longfellow's religious thought, moreover, was not the result of a development, as was the case with Bryant; nor did it define itself into a philosophy, as did Emerson's; neither did it take on so practical and circumstantial a form as did Whittier's. The keynote of Longfellow's religious belief was perhaps sounded when he wrote in his diary, "We have but one life here on earth and we must make that beautiful. And to do this, health and elasticity of mind are needful; and whatever endangers or impedes them must be avoided." Calmness and sweetness of spirit in full accordance with this entry were indeed the chief characteristics of Longfellow's temperament. Through the possession of some unusual and superior instinct, his soul seemed unerringly to accept or reject whatever would assist or delay its fullest development.

Apparently, without resort to any book, council, or creed, as a source of authority, he took his unquestioning stand upon the three important fundamental doctrines, the goodness of God, the divinity of Christ, and the immortality of the soul. Never dealing in subtleties of logic, he seems to have assumed that like himself every one of his readers had become as a little child and therefore worthy to enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

Although Longfellow at no time turned to the Bible for authoritative substantiation of theological doctrine or religious faith, his poems abound in Scriptural allusions and quotations. All was fish to his net when he desired to express himself poetically. He laid hold upon whatever would help him to render his thought clear or his expression artistic, and made it serve those purposes alone. From the nature of the subject-matter *Judas Maccabæus* was woven, warp and woof, from allusions to the Jewish *Apocrypha;* and Puritan stories like *The Courtship of Miles Standish* and *Giles Corey of Salem Farms,* Quaker tales like *Elizabeth* and *John Endicott,* medieval pictures like *The Vision Beautiful, King Robert of Sicily,* and *The Children's Crusade,* and scenes in the life of Christ like *The Three Kings, Blind Bartimeus,* and *The Sifting of Peter* gained and still gain pronounced verisimilitude from their frequent allusions to incidents, characters, and teachings found in the *New Testament.* In some cases Longfellow even went so far as to transcribe into his poems long passages unchanged in diction from the King James

version of the Scriptures. Perhaps the most striking, though by no means the only example of such incorporation of material is found in the eighth section of *The Divine Tragedy*. There, except that, to satisfy the demands of metre, seven unimportant words are omitted and six others equally unimportant are interpolated, the parable of the two prayers offered in the temple is transferred bodily from the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel according to Saint Luke.

> " Two men went up into the temple to pray.
> The one was a self-righteous Pharisee,
> The other a Publican. And the Pharisee
> Stood and prayed thus within himself! O God,
> I thank thee that I am not as other men,
> Extortioners, unjust, adulterers,
> Or even as this Publican. I fast
> Twice in the week, and also I give tithes
> Of all that I possess! The Publican,
> Standing afar off, would not lift so much
> Even as his eyes to Heaven, but smote his breast,
> Saying: God be merciful to me a sinner!
> I tell you that this man went to his house
> More justified than the other. Every one
> That doth exalt himself shall be abased,
> And he that humbleth himself shall be exalted! "

Like all poets Longfellow frequently turned to history for subject-matter; but he did not, like Bryant and Whittier, make use of it to support his religious convictions. A similar statement might be made regarding his treatment of nature. She was not to him a teacher as she was to Bryant; nor part and parcel of God as she was to Emerson;

nor a symbol as she was to Whittier. To Longfellow she had objective existence, and because of her beauty was worthy of admiration; yet she seems never to have been to him a source of truth. Once indeed, writing under the influence of a German poet, Longfellow, in the early poem entitled *Flowers*, spoke of the blossoms of the field as a revelation of God and later on hailed them as

> "Emblems of our own great resurrection,
> Emblems of the bright and better land."

Such a use of Nature, however, hardly ever recurs in the whole body of his poetry; as a rule, she had for him a message of a far different order. True, he called the songs of birds "lovely lyrics written by the hand of God" and regarded the geologist Agassiz as "summoned to read what is still unread in the manuscripts of God" and found, like Bryant, that the forest is at times a cathedral far surpassing any edifice of worship built by human hands; yet he turned to nature primarily, not for information, but for consolation, inspiration, repose. He felt the calm, majestic presence of the night, as she drew near to lay her fingers on the lips of Care and bid them complain no more; he learned from the rising of the red planet Mars, the star of the unconquered will, how sublime a thing it is to suffer and be strong; he looked upon the river moving onward without haste or noise and knew that wisdom lies in calm contentment and in perfect self-control. Plainly Nature to Longfellow, as he said in a sonnet to which he gave that very name, was not a teacher

solving problems and demonstrating rules; rather was she a mentor leading mankind gently, yet not the less firmly, to the true understanding of life.

"As a fond mother when the day is o'er,
Leads by the hand her little child to bed,
Half willing, half reluctant to be led,
And leaves his broken playthings on the floor,
Still gazing at them through the open door,
Nor wholly reassured and comforted
By promises of others in their stead,
Which, though more splendid, may not please him more;
So Nature deals with us, and takes away
Our playthings one by one, and by the hand
Leads us to rest so gently, that we go
Scarce knowing if we wish to go or stay,
Being too full of sleep to understand
How far th' unknown transcends the what we know."

The theological concept of the Trinity seems not to have greatly interested Longfellow. Certainly he dismissed it much more readily than Bryant to whom it persisted in presenting itself; and he gave it far less attention than Whittier whose *Trinitas* was the record of a real agitation of soul. That he accepted the doctrine as truth may perhaps be assumed from the couplet which stands as the fifth of his several experiments in *Elegiac Verse*,

"How can the Three be One? you ask me: I answer by asking,
Hail and snow and rain, are they not three and yet one?"

However much or little these lines may be assumed to prove, it is but just to admit that of the several persons in the Trinity, Longfellow in his poems only occasionally mentioned the Holy Spirit and

in no place greatly developed his thought of the Father and the Son. Manifestly, he trusted in the power, the wisdom, the justice, the mercy, and the goodness of God; yet his faith seldom, if ever, found any other expression than the reiteration in one form or another that the ways of our Heavenly Father are always best. Again, although the most minute details of the life of Christ, so far as they are recorded in the Gospels, were well known to him, he was never led to dwell, in his shorter poems at least, upon his belief in the incarnation, the resurrection, and the ascension. His failure to give a precise definition of his religious faith, however, does not at any time obscure the fact that he was Christian in the fullest sense of that term. Certainly he cannot at any time be regarded as a doubter, if we will but recall his frequent insistence that Christ is eternal. Again, though we may rarely be able to place a finger upon a dogmatic statement, we find the fundamental teachings of Jesus, like a good diffused, permeating the whole of the poet's work. Turn to whatever page we will, those teachings appear, not as the pattern it is true, but rather as threads serving now as warp and now as woof in the poems of Longfellow's weaving. Thus it comes about that the poet's readers are driven to the conclusion that his faith was sound. Only on such an assumption can sincerity be postulated as one of his attributes, can real force be regarded as inherent in his frequently repeated idea, most sweetly expressed perhaps in the lines from the poem entitled *Elegiac,*

" In a haven of rest my heart is riding at anchor,
Held by the chains of love, held by the anchors of trust! "

Upon the daily life and the spiritual state of the minister of the Gospel, Longfellow held quite decided opinions. To his mind the man who believed himself called to work in the vineyard of his Master must needs strive hourly to be perfect even as his Father in Heaven is perfect. What in Longfellow's opinion such a man should not be, is best described in *The Birds of Killingworth.* There the parson of the town is pictured as —

" A man austere,
The instinct of whose nature was to kill;
The wrath of God he preached from year to year,
And read with fervor, Edwards on the Will;
His favorite pastime was to slay the deer
In Summer on some Adirondac hill;
E'en now, while walking down the rural lane,
He lopped the wayside lilies with his cane."

In contrast with this satiric presentation of a shepherd who could have been but a blind leader of the blind, one recalls the priest in *Evangeline,* that Father Felician, who stilled the strife and contention of his angry people and led them to utter the forgiving petition of their crucified Saviour. One thinks too of one of the story-tellers in the Wayside Inn, the gentle theologian who practiced the Gospel of the Golden Rule and strove " to build the universal church lofty as is the love of God and ample as the wants of man." The true pastor, Longfellow held, does not need a stately

edifice wherein he and his flock may house themselves while he delivers his message. The surroundings are nothing, the man is all, he wrote in *Old St. David's at Radnor*, —

> " It is not the wall of stone without
> That makes the building small or great,
> But the soul's light shining round about,
> And the faith that overcometh doubt,
> And the love that stronger is than hate."

Such light, such faith, such love, come not, in Longfellow's opinion, by chance. In the *Hymn* written for his brother's ordination he clearly recorded his belief that the true minister of God is divinely summoned, divinely commissioned, and divinely allowed to be the daily companion of his risen Lord.

> " Christ to the young man said: ' Yet one thing more;
> If thou wouldst perfect be,
> Sell all thou hast and give it to the poor,
> And come and follow me! ' "
>
> " Within this temple Christ again, unseen,
> Those sacred words hath said
> And His invisible hands today have been
> Laid on a young man's head.
>
> " And evermore beside him on his way
> The unseen Christ shall move,
> That he may lean upon his arm and say,
> ' Dost thou, dear Lord, approve? ' "

In the poem just cited Longfellow obviously expressed his belief that the minister of the Gospel

must accept quite literally the words of Jesus, "Lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world." Elsewhere, he no less plainly showed it to be his opinion that all men would do well to make of their religion, not a theory, but a practice. In the theological sciences of dogmatics and apologetics, he had hardly even the most remote interest, far less indeed, save perhaps Whitman, than had any other American poet. Certainly in the matter of religion Longfellow seems never to have felt himself called upon to make assertions, to seek evidence, or to defend his position. Had a person approached the poet with a demand for the intellectual basis of his belief, he would no doubt have been greeted with mild surprise; and had he pressed the question, he would probably have received no further answer than "I have felt." Nevertheless, Longfellow, looking upon the ideal of Christ as that toward which every man should strive, made righteousness of life the constant burden of his message. Through the angel in *The Golden Legend*, Longfellow himself cried out to all men, —

> "Be noble in every thought
> Be true in every deed!
> Let not the illusions of the senses
> Betray thee to deadly offences.
> Be strong! be good! be pure!
> The right only shall endure,
> All things else are but pretenses."

As in this passage, so elsewhere was Longfellow often formally didactic; yet his method was almost

always persuasive rather than preceptive. So attractively did he clothe his thought of what constitutes the better ordering of life, so skillfully did he sound the call to duty and to the need of hourly choosing the good part which shall not be taken away, that it may not unjustly be said of him, as it was said long ago of a greater than he, " the common people heard him gladly."

In his comprehensive outlook upon the ages of a man's life, Longfellow saw not seven but seventy times seven. Judging after the manner of the spirit and not after the manner of the world, he regarded each day as hardly less than an epoch in the life of the soul. Again and again he dwelt upon the fact that the past cannot be recalled, cannot be revived. This thought is the burden of the songs in *Keramos*, as it is also the chief teaching of *Morituri Salutamus*

> " Whatever hath been written shall remain,
> Nor be erased nor written o'er again;
> The unwritten only still belongs to thee:
> Take heed, and ponder well what that shall be."

The same lesson reappears in *The Two Rivers* where the streams of Yesterday and of Tomorrow are spoken of as making their way one to the land of darkness and dreams, the other to the land of promise and light. It recurs in *Michael Angelo*, in Valdesso's remark that " we ourselves when we commit a sin, lose Paradise as much as Adam did "; and it finds its most beautiful, though at the same time most solemn expression in *Sundown*,

> " On the road of life one milestone more!
> In the book of life one leaf turned o'er!
> Like a red seal is the setting sun
> On the good and evil men have done, —
> Naught can today restore! "

Irrevocably gone Longfellow might teach the past to be, yet he never once sounded the note of despair. He might bewail the fact that labor with what zeal we will, something still remains undone, yet he pointed out more than once the futility of sitting down to measure by any absolute standard the loss and gain in each day's life. He saw that defeat might be victory in disguise; he believed with Saint Augustine that " of our vices we can build a ladder if we will but tread beneath our feet each deed of shame "; he held that we might well fix our eyes upon the path leading to higher destinies,—

> " Nor deem the irrevocable Past
> As wholly wasted, wholly vain,
> If rising on its wrecks, at last
> To something nobler we attain."

Ready though he was to admit in *The Sifting of Peter* that the scars of sin remain, that lost innocence returns no more, he none the less insisted that earnest souls may press through dust and heat, and refusing to accept disaster as final, may for their very failures find themselves the stronger, and become true conquerors at last. Longfellow plainly saw that there is no man but shall be tempted, tried, and sifted, no man but shall sometimes fall into sin, no man but shall some day deny his Master; still he felt that even in the hour of deepest humilia-

tion, a man may cherish the consciousness of his unquenchable divinity and hope to build, however late, a tabernacle worthy of his Lord.

Convinced that neither in the clamor of the crowded thoroughfare nor in the shouts and plaudits of the multitude, but in ourselves alone are triumph and defeat, Longfellow laid stress upon the moulding power which exists in the performance of of the duty lying nearest to one's hand. Such is the basic thought of *The Builders*, of *Gaspar Becerra* and of many another poem. What though one die unknown? Longfellow asked in substance, what though in the passing of the years one be quite forgotten? What though one's tower like Giotto's stand forever incomplete,

> "No endeavor is in vain;
> Its reward is in the doing,
> And the rapture of pursuing
> Is the prize the vanquished win."

"Work is prayer," says Vittoria in speaking of the labors of Michael Angelo; and that great artist unconsciously re-echoes her thought when he rebukes the unstable Benvenuto Cellini with the words, "Have faith in nothing but in industry, and work right on through censure and applause." Pope Julius, too, in the same drama, holding that all great achievements are the natural fruits of a great character, is confident that by the excellence of the work we know the master's hand. As in these words which Longfellow placed upon the lips of three of his characters, so elsewhere did he reiterate his steady belief that success is based upon

honest unappreciated daily toil, upon work hourly performed for the very work's sake. Nor, to his mind, we may conclude from another passage in *Michael Angelo*, is the structure of a noble mind ever builded upon foundations essentially different or in any way less secure.

> "When anything is done,
> People see not the patient doing of it,
> Nor think how great would be the loss to man
> If it had not been done. As in a building
> Stone rests on stone, and wanting the foundation
> All would be wanting, so in human life
> Each action rests on the foregoing event,
> That made it possible, but is forgotten
> And buried in the earth."

To each hour its work, to each day its task, to each life its duty, is the great unifying principle underlying Longfellow's theory of character and conduct. Obedient himself to the call which, as he said in the *Prelude* to *Voices of the Night*, summoned him from the contemplation of mountain, forest, and stream to an acquaintance with the sorrows and joys dwelling within the human heart, he could well be urgent with his fellow-men that they should acquit themselves nobly in the battle of life. Exhausted at times by his own toil with book and pen, he tells us in *Weariness*, he could but look with pity upon the helpless infant whose little hands must learn to serve or rule, whose little feet must wander on through hopes and fears, must ache and bleed beneath their load. Nevertheless he saw clearly that those who follow us, must find

hope and strength for themselves, however eager we may be to yield them aid or spare them pain. Looking back upon his early days, he might in *My Lost Youth* recall that "a boy's way is the wind's way and the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts"; or safe in his manhood, he might rejoice to see the young spring forward in the race, full of hope and sublime audacity; still nothing short of well-ordered conduct, and complete self-control could meet his approval. Crowded with work as his own days always were, he recorded in the sonnet named *Mezzo Cammin* the deep regret that half his life was gone and that still the aspiration of his youth to build some tower of song with lofty parapet was unfulfilled. Nor, to his mind, could old age justly feel that it had earned the right to rest entirely from its labors, offering excuse in the thought that the night is come and that it is no longer day. To any who would give such reason for inactivity he spoke in *Morituri Salutamus* the stern, yet not the less inspiriting rebuke, —

> "The night hath not yet come; we are not quite
> Cut off from labor by the failing light;
> Something remains for us to do or dare;
> Even the oldest tree some fruit may bear;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "For age is opportunity no less
> Than youth itself, though in another dress;
> And as the evening twilight fades away,
> The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day."

Believing that man's chief duty from childhood to old age is to strive without ceasing after the

highest good, Longfellow had little sympathy with those who would undertake to compromise with evil. He found, it is true, a certain poetic pleasure in the quaint thought that since Lucifer is permitted to live, he must therefore in a sense be God's minister working for some Good not understood by man; but he did not really believe in the existence of a personal devil, laying seige to the heart of man and tempting him to sin. Rather holding with Saint James that we are drawn away and enticed by our own desires, Longfellow recast in *The Golden Legend* a part of that apostle's message in the words,

> "Our lusts and passions are the downward stair
> That leads the soul from a diviner air."

Again, Longfellow may have been pleased to fancy that the memorial of a righteous act is immediately registered in heaven, but that the book wherein our evil deeds are written remains open for a time, that by repentance and prayer we may erase the records from its pages; yet he had no patience with those who like Julia, in the drama of *Michael Angelo* —

> "Would clothe the soul with all the Christian graces,
> Yet not despoil the body of its gauds;
> Would feed the soul with spiritual food,
> Yet not deprive the body of its feasts;
> Would seem angelic in the sight of God,
> Yet not too saintlike in the eyes of man;
> In short would lead a holy Christian life
> In such a way that even one's nearest friend
> Would not detect them in one circumstance
> To show a change from what it was before."

This arraignment of one who would find a path however narrow between the material and the spiritual world, of one who would feast at once upon the fleshpots of Egypt and the manna sent down from Heaven, was the method chosen by Longfellow to teach the lesson that Christianity, if it is to be worth anything at all, must be first and foremost truly practical. To his mind, the Christian like the tree in the parable is known by its fruits, — the followers of Christ are to be adjudged profitable or unprofitable servants according as they are true doers or mere hearers of the words of their Master.

In the last analysis, the essence of Christ's teaching is love. Although hope is repeatedly enjoined upon us by the Scriptures, and although we are told more than once that if we have faith even as a grain of mustard, we have but to command and mountains shall be removed, yet is it not made plain that it is not so much the power springing from hope and faith which we are to cultivate, as that arising from love? The Law and the Prophets, it is pointed out, hang upon just two commandments, that we love the Lord with heart and soul and mind, and that we love our neighbors as ourselves. Still, between these two commandments there seems to be a difference in degree, since the beloved disciple felt called upon to ask, in his letter addressed to the Church at large, if a man loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? This doctrine both in the emphasis laid upon the surpassing

value of love and in the accent placed upon the need of making love a practical element in one's association with one's fellows, Longfellow saw fit to present repeatedly. Disseminated through several poems, it is gathered into a single stanza near the close of *Tegner's Drapa*, but is more beautifully expressed, no doubt, in one of the *Tales of the Wayside Inn*.

> "The reign of violence is dead,
> Or dying surely from the world;
> While Love triumphant reigns instead,
> And in a brighter sky o'erhead
> Its blessed banners are unfurled.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "Not to one church alone, but seven
> The voice prophetic spake from heaven;
> And unto each the promise came,
> Diversified, but still the same."

In these words Longfellow gave expression to his understanding of Christ's frequently inculcated lesson of Love. Elsewhere it showed other aspects. It appeared as indignant pity throughout the volume called *Poems on Slavery*, as sympathetic freedom from prejudice in *The Jewish Cemetery at Newport*, as tenderness and humility in *Helen of Tyre*, and as discerning liberality in *The Saga of King Olaf*. Love, the reflective reader soon perceives, is the great principle underlying the whole of Longfellow's thought. Like faith, it was to him an evidence of things unseen. Through it he became as one of those whose creed is, not a dead formula of words, but a daily living in the

spirit of Christ. Of such, with nothing less than inspiration, he wrote in one of the interludes of the *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, —

> " The passing of their beautiful feet
> Blesses the pavement of the street,
> And all their looks and words repeat
> Old Fuller's saying, wise and sweet,
> Not as a vulture, but a dove,
> The Holy Ghost came from above."

Longfellow's belief that love should be the adjusting force of our daily conduct not only gave him peace in his outlook upon life, but made him peculiarly serene in his contemplation of death. That he grieved deeply over the loss of those whom he loved is plainly evident in such poems as *Footsteps of Angels*, *The Cross of Snow*, *The Chamber over the Gate*, and *Three Friends of Mine;* yet never did he sorrow as those who have no hope. Even in the earliest hours of separation from one of his children, he could write in *Resignation*, —

> " There is no Death! What seems so is transition;
> This life of mortal breath
> Is but a suburb of the life Elysian,
> Whose portal we call Death."

His daughter was not dead, she had but gone into a larger school where Christ himself would be her teacher; his friend, Parker Cleaveland, although he slept, had none the less awakened, since God had said Amen! Members of the companions of his early life had been carried one by one to their

graves, yet he thought of them, not as buried, but as joined to that other band of living " called mistakenly the dead "; Bayard Taylor lay at rest among his books, but in some realm, some planet, some star, some vast ærial space, he walked in peaceful gardens of delight. Palfrey and Agassiz, Hawthorne and Sumner had forgotten the pathway to the poet's door, had left him with the sense that something unreplaceable was gone from nature, that summer was not summer, nor could be, since they died; yet his trust remained unshaken and he found strength to say in *Auf Wiedersehen*, —

" It were a double grief, if the true-hearted,
Who loved us here, should on the farther shore
Remember us no more.

" Believing, in the midst of our afflictions,
That death is a beginning, not an end,
We call to them, and send
Farewells, that better might be called predictions,
Being fore-shadowings of the future, thrown
Into the vast unknown.

Faith overleaps the confines of our reason,
And if by faith, as in old times was said,
Women received their dead
Raised up to life, then only for a season
Our partings are, nor shall we wait in vain
Until we meet again! "

Men who like Prince Henry in the *Christus* hold tenaciously to earth, may regard the thought of death with terror; others who think of a book in which are written our failings, faults, and evils,

our secret sins, shortcomings and despair, may shudder in fear; but Longfellow, believing that they who live the life of the spirit now shall continue to live that life hereafter, had no such dread. To him as to his heroine Elsie in *The Golden Legend*, the grave was but a covered bridge leading from light to light through a brief darkness. At one time, he likened death to the lifting of a latch; at another, to the chillness which precedes the dawn, wherein we shudder for a moment ere we waken in the broad sunshine of the other life; at still another, to the stepping forth into the open air from a tent already luminous with light shining through its transparent walls. In Longfellow's vision, only upon those who live unworthily does Death descend as a relentless archer cruel and swift. At times, it is true, Death to the poet, took on the form of an unexpected guest who waiting for no man's leisure, steps in unasked and unannounced to put a stop to all our occupations and designs; but he presents himself more vividly, now as the Driver of the ploughshare in whose furrow we are sown; now as the Reaper who reaps the bearded grain at a breath and the flowers that grow between; and now as the Angel of the amaranthine wreath, descending to whisper with a breath divine the summons to the state of perfect peace.

Dead, in the language of every day life, our friends may be, but the poet can think of them as never dying. Not only does the light which a great man like Sumner leaves behind him lie for years upon the path of men; not only does the city

of Nuremberg seem famous because Durer once trod its pavements, once breathed its air; not only do the passion and pain of hearts that long have ceased to beat remain to throb in hearts that are or are to be; but to Longfellow the soul of every man itself lives on, a conscious personality existent in some other sphere of activity than this material world. Though it has forever gone from us who yet remain in the flesh, it has but moved a little nearer " to the Master of all music, to the Master of all singing." So believing, Longfellow placed his own conviction upon the lips of Preciosa in *The Spanish Student* when he caused her to answer her own question why she should fear death, with the thought that to die is to leave all disappointment, care, and sorrow; all ignominy, suffering and despair, and be at rest forever. Still Longfellow's attitude towards death was something far greater than a reconciliation to an inevitable change, something far more courageous than a willingness to accept one's fate, something far more manly than a giving way to longing for the rest which takes the place of the painful activity of our present life. From the beginning to the end of Longfellow's career, life to him was real, was earnest, — death was anything but the goal. The manly heroism of Browning's *Prospice*, the dauntless fortitude of Tennyson's *Silent Voices* were not wanting in the American poet. He too, as his *Victor and Vanquished* plainly shows, would make a final stand, he too would meet the last enemy of mankind in courageous, yes, in conquering strife,

"As one who long hath fled with panting breath
Before his foe, bleeding and near to fall,
I turn and set my back against the wall,
And look thee in the face, triumphant Death.
I call for aid, and no one answereth;
I am alone with thee, who conquerest all;
Yet me thy threatening form doth not appall,
For thou art but a phantom and a wraith. —
Wounded and weak, sword broken at the hilt,
With armor shattered, and without a shield,
I stand unmoved; do with me what thou wilt;
I can resist no more, but will not yield.
This is no tournament where cowards tilt;
The vanquished here is victor of the field."

VII

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

The poetry of Holmes is far from being the most important product of his genius. Although in amount it exceeds that of either Bryant, Poe, or Emerson, it consists so largely of the kind of verse termed " occasional " that it presents but a slender sheaf of songs having any likelihood of attaining immortality. *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-table*, it may quite fearlessly be asserted, is a real contribution to permanent literature; but the genial humor which gives that prose work enduring vitality fails, though present, to perform the same service for its author's poetry. Holmes, it is true, was so facile as a versifier and so ready as a wit, that for more than half a century he was called upon to be poet at nearly every important public meeting in Boston, and at not a few elsewhere. The same characteristics, moreover, made him peculiarly and uniformly successful as a writer of parodies, mock-heroics, and *vers-de-société*; for, copious as all his work of this kind was, the spontaneous humor which permeated it never by any chance degenerated in quality or gave the impression of being forced. Nevertheless, well-known as Holmes became as an occasional poet and humorist, he could not, any more than any other author, gain thereby lasting renown. Many a poem which

at the time of its delivery under specially favorable circumstances seems hardly less than inspired, often becomes quite commonplace when there is a change of environment, or after years have passed away. Moreover, as Holmes himself admitted in *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-table,* it is a dangerous thing for a literary man to indulge his love for the ridiculous, since his readers laugh with him as long as he amuses them, but, most likely, at him when he attempts to be serious.

Holmes, however, did dare to run the risk of being so laughed at, and for his courage received his due reward. Scattered here and there among his occasional and his humorous verses are many noble poems which, written beyond a doubt in the hope that they would be read with all seriousness, have not failed of a sympathetic audience. Although it must be admitted that a few of these pieces are, from the point of view of the present day, somewhat over-sentimental in the manner of Hood and Moore, and for that reason old-fashioned, it cannot be denied that many others, through their quaint simplicity and obvious sincerity, are unforgettable. *Old Ironsides* is a permanent contribution to the literature of America; *The Last Leaf,* after four-score years of existence is still remarkable for its exquisite mingling of humor and pathos; *The Voiceless* and *Under the Violets* have not become incapable of making misty the eyes of the reader; *O Love Divine* and *Lord of All Being! Throned Afar,* are printed in the hymn-books of nearly every creed, and are sung in nearly every

church where the English language is known. And *The Boys*, written half a century ago for an anniversary of the members of Holmes's own class in Harvard, still lays hold upon the heart-strings of every man who at any time has been a college student. The even-flowing humor of the poem catches and holds the attention of the reader, not by its fun alone, but by its restraint. Then while the lips are still curved by the smile which the whimsical turns in the thought awaken, the very soul is stirred by the all but incomparable ending,—

> "And when we have done with our life-lasting toys,
> Dear Father, take care of thy children, the Boys!"

This prayer which Holmes placed at the close of a poem written when he was well on in middle life, was no conventional formula of words or belief. It was a sincere appeal to a Being who hears and answers the petitions of His children. It must be admitted, however, that Holmes could not have so expressed himself in the first decades of his career. The conception of God which the poet held in 1859 was not that of his early manhood, but was rather the result of an evolution in thought. Not even in the most serious of his early poems did he anywhere mention God under any name whatever, and the few scattering allusions which he made to angels, to Eden, to the Virgin Mary, or to Saint Genevieve cannot be regarded as anything more than ornamental additions to his verse. In *Poetry*, a metrical essay delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard University in 1836, he

spoke, it is true, of God as the Maker of all things, and later on, in the same poem, he even included the truly poetic lines —

> " Yet Faith's pure hymn, beneath its shelter rude,
> Breathes out as sweetly to the tangled wood
> As when the rays through pictured glories pour
> On marble shaft and tessellated floor; —
> Heaven asks no surplice round the heart that feels,
> And all is holy where devotion kneels."

Religiously satisfactory, of course, this passage is, yet it indicates nothing more than a single forward step from the author's early position. Certainly it cannot be safely quoted as being undoubtedly theistic, nor can any lines be cited from poems written by Holmes during the next ten years which prove him to be other than a deist in faith and thought. He seems never to have denied the existence of a God endowed with supreme power and intelligence; but it was only after a period of many years that his conception of God as the Creator of the universe, the Master-worker in nature, the Moulder of man, the Director of history was filled out and completed by the idea that He is One whom men may think of as a sympathetic daily Companion, as a Father bending in love above His children.

At no time in his life could Holmes have been justly called a sceptic in the popular sense of that term. Questioner, however, he undoubtedly was from the beginning of his career to the end. Unwilling to take anything religious on trust alone,

he never appealed to the Bible as authority although he did quote from it extensively. Trained, as he said himself in *The School-Boy* "to judge men's dogmas by their deeds," he was restless under claims and assertions made in the name of the Church alone, and firmly insisted upon his right to think for himself. That he had charity for all forms of sincere belief, the poem entitled *Astræa* — to mention no other — plainly shows; but for himself he held, as in *The Mind's Diet*, that

> "No reasoning natures find it safe to feed,
> For their sole diet, on a single creed."

He could be patient with men who like Jonathan Edwards in seeking God have lost their human hearts; he could understand the agony of soul which comes to many when they find that the belief of their childhood is being undermined by doubt; but he none the less felt constrained to ask in *The School-Boy*,

> "Why should we look one common faith to find,
> When one in every score is color-blind?
> If here on earth they know not red from green,
> Will they see better into things unseen!"

In establishing his own faith Holmes drew somewhat from Nature, somewhat from History, testing and refining all that he regarded as ore by passing it through the fires of his own unusually keen and sane intellect. Yet if Holmes uniformly held that his religious belief must have the approval of his head as well as of his heart, he never fell into the error of assuming that the human mind is the

final measure of all truth. How plainly he saw that the wisdom of God transcends the intelligence of man, one may read in the concluding lines of the poem called *Our Limitations:* —

> " Eternal Truth! beyond our hopes and fears,
> Sweep the vast orbits of thy myriad spheres!
> From age to age, while History carves sublime
> On her waste rock the flaming curves of time,
> How the wild swayings of our planet show
> That worlds unseen surround the world we know."

Convinced that the realms of truth stretch far beyond the ken of human understanding, Holmes could easily say in *The Old Player* that Truth — that is, final Truth — is for other spheres, and Hope for this; and could readily speak pityingly, though quite uncontemptuously, in *Terpsichore*, of those who will not learn that in this lower world some doubts must darken faith and trust. Still, Holmes would have been the last to admit that the truth which the mind of man is capable of perceiving, is always relative and never by any possibility absolute. Exclaim though he did in *Wind Clouds and Star Drifts,* —

> " Alas! how much that seemed immortal truth
> That heroes fought for, martyrs died to save,
> Reveals the earth-born lineage, growing old
> And limping on its march, its wings unplumed,
> Its heavenly semblance faded like a dream! "

he yet clung tenaciously to his confident trust that man made in the image of God gains from time to time, as the centuries go by, a firm and unquestionable footing. Again and again his unshakable

belief that Truth is the guiding star of life reasserted itself in his poetry — Truth bound by no rusted chain which the past has forged, Truth so untrammelled that Faith, as he remarked in *The School-Boy*, must smile to find her sister free. Freedom of thought indeed was to Holmes but little less than a passion. In one of his sonnets read before the New York Harvard Club, he makes it clear that he felt our eldest sire did well when at the beginning of his search for truth, he stretched forth his hand and laid hold upon the forbidden bough. He glories in the fact that *Veritas* is boldly inscribed upon the portals of the foremost seat of learning in the land, that no church can bind his much loved Harvard College in bonds of human creed. To him Truth, heaven-born Truth, for which the saint has lived, the hero died, is

> "The mighty word that upward leads
> Through noble thought to nobler deeds —
> Truth — the one word that makes a slave a man!"

The reader, it must be admitted, searches in vain through the poems of Holmes to discover anything beyond the faintest outline of a creed. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned above once or twice, and the allusions to Jesus are rare. Though the Son of Mary is now and then called the Master, he is never spoken of as the Christ in the noblest sense of that term. *The Mother's Secret*, a marvelously sympathetic study of the mind of the Virgin, evidently implies that all that was divinely wonderful in the holy life of the Nazarene was but a sacred

legend. Even the fine use made of the story of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus, in the lines written in memory of Charles Upham, hardly suggests that Holmes regarded the Biblical narrative as true. For him the theories of the Incarnation and the Atonement had apparently no attraction; and if he dwelt in thought at all upon the Resurrection and the Ascension, he sought for what might be called the basic principle underlying a devout myth. He was far from willing to brush ruthlessly away the accumulation of years of religious contemplation and belief; yet he felt that the time had come for a readjustment, a restatement of theological conceptions. How little arrogant his attitude was, however, may best be learned from the single stanza written to be read at the Unitarian Festival held on March 8, 1882.

> " The waves unbuild the wasting shore;
> Where mountains towered, the billows sweep,
> Yet still their borrowed spoils restore,
> And build new empires from the deep.
> So while the floods of thought lay waste
> The proud domain of priestly creeds,
> Its heaven-appointed tides will haste
> To plant new homes for human needs.
> Be ours to mark with hearts unchilled
> The change an outworn church deplores;
> The legend sinks, but Faith shall build
> A fairer throne on new found shores."

One may readily gather from these lines that Holmes was far from creedless in thought, however much he seemed so in word. In *The Autocrat*

of the Breakfast-table, indeed, he had said, "I have a creed — none better and none shorter. It is told in two words — the first two of the *Pater Noster*. And when I say these words, I mean them." The words "Our Father," then expressed the belief of Holmes in its lowest terms; somewhat enlarged it might have been exactly formulated in Christ's well-known summary of the Law and the Prophets; still further detailed, it would have presented three tenets as unquestionable: God is Love; Charity never faileth; and this mortality shall put on immortality.

Holmes after having once come to the conclusion that he could honestly use the words, God is Love, seems never to have wearied in re-iterating the thought which they express. It appears almost like a formula in *Astræa* and in *Tartarus;* it is strongly implied in *The Word of Promise* and in *Wind Clouds and Star Drifts;* it is developed at large in *The Crooked Footpath* and in the *Hymn of Trust.* It is not too much to say, indeed, that Holmes succeeded far better than Bryant or Emerson, Whittier, or Longfellow in making the Companionship of God a living fact. To him God is a patient and long-suffering Father eagerly awaiting the time when we shall know Him as He is. In striving after Him, we have, according to Holmes in *Wind Clouds and Star Drifts*, far too frequently worshipped idols of our own making, brutal deities possessed of not a single divine attribute, foolish conceptions but too plainly betraying their human origin; nevertheless, de-

spite our errors, wilful or mistaken though they may be, God is still the Father of His nursery-brood, smiling perhaps to see us with the toys we call by sacred names and idly feign to be what we call them. Plainly the loving Fatherhood of God is the dominating idea of Holmes's religious thought. God, he pointed out in *Manhood*, must be truer than the truest friend, more tender than a woman's love, a Father, indeed, who is better than the best of sires and kinder than the kindest mother ever known. It is this conviction which underlies the *Hymn of Trust*, perhaps the most thoroughly satisfying sacred lyric written by an American author,

"O Love Divine, that stooped to share
Our sharpest pang, our bitterest tear,
On Thee we cast each earth-born care,
We smile at pain while Thou art near!

"Though long the weary way we tread,
And sorrow crown each lingering year,
No path we shun, no darkness dread,
Our hearts still whispering, Thou art near!

"When drooping pleasure turns to grief,
And trembling faith is changed to fear,
The murmuring wind, the quivering leaf,
Shall softly tell us, Thou art near!

"On Thee we fling our burdening woe,
O Love Divine, forever dear,
Content to suffer, while we know,
Living and dying, Thou art near!"

The conviction that God is a loving Father dwelling so near us that in Him we indeed live and move and have our being, frequently led Holmes to express in the forms of verse his prayers of thanksgiving, trust, and praise. Nor, if we may judge from the number of petitions which in his poems he addressed to his Heavenly Father, did he doubt that God may hear and answer the cries of His children. True, Holmes struggled as every man must struggle with the problem of why God at times seems wholly indifferent to our needs; yet he never took the stand that the prayer of petition is wasted breath, neither did he assert that a man's prayerful utterance of desire, frequently led to his continuing his strife with such confidence that through himself and through himself alone he gained what he sought. Occasionally Holmes checked rising doubt by concluding that the ways of God are past finding out; more frequently he kept his faith stable by remembering that when God does not grant the very thing for which we beg, He often substitutes another gift which proves in time to be a greater blessing than any we have dared ask.

In his evaluation of prayer, Holmes comes to no estimate essentially different from that reached by numbers of other men. He could have had but little sympathy with those who would bargain with the Lord, as we are told indeed did certain Israelites of old who promised, if assured of reward, to serve faithfully. Rather must he have been mindful of the fact that the founder of Christianity, —

desiring that not His will but His Father's should be done — asked vainly that the cup of suffering might pass from Him. Some idea of what Holmes thought a prayer should be, may be gathered from that passage in *The Professor at the Breakfast-table*, descriptive of the scene about the Little Gentleman's deathbed. The example there given of what must be regarded under the circumstance as nothing short of perfect prayer, needs no comment; it may be supplemented, however, by the fact that elsewhere — in *The Poet of the Breakfast-table* — Holmes insisted that above all things the tongue that tells our sorrows and our sins to heaven must represent ourselves,

> "And not that other self which nods and smiles
> And babbles in our name."

Clearly it is the belief of Holmes, that sincere earnest prayer is acceptable to our Father in Heaven, than the accomplishment of whose will His faithful children have no other desire. To Him we may address our petitions, sure that what we ask will be given us, if, in His far-reaching righteousness, the boon we crave is one a God of Love may grant.

The second tenet of Holmes's religious creed — so far as it can be said from a study of his poetry that he had one — was based upon the first; for certainly, if God is Love, Love is of God. In arriving at the point of view that love for one's fellow-man is the prime characteristic of a religion

pure and undefiled in the sight of Heaven, Holmes was but following in the footsteps of Saint John who himself had found his guidance in the teachings of One whom he regarded as God incarnate. How close that following was, is clear to any one who will take the trouble to compare the Epistles of the Beloved Disciple as a whole with the thirty-fourth verse of the thirteenth chapter of that same disciple's narrative of the life of his Master. One would have no right to contend, of course, that Holmes presents a striking contrast to other American poets in his acceptance of the teaching, that of the Christian virtues charity is the greatest; yet one may boldly assert that, as he succeeded by some inexplicable means in making the Fatherhood and the Love of God a convincing fact, so without obvious effort he made his readers feel that love of one's neighbor is the essential characteristic of a well-ordered life. In other words, Holmes more than any of his fellow-poets made the two doctrines, the Love of God and the Love of every man for his brother, seem thoroughly practical for all times and seasons, and under all circumstances and onditions.

Charity, indeed, in one sense or another was with Holmes an insistent theme. The poem *Non-Resistance* shows how well its author understood the hearts of those who held what he called the passive creed in an hour when the souls of men grew hot with rage, even while hoping against hope that civil war would not rend the South from the North; *The Two Streams* is a plea for reservation of judgment upon the conduct of our fellows, since we

cannot know from how slight a cause two brothers may pass

> " From the same cradle's side,
> From the same mother's knee, —
> One to long darkness and the freezing tide,
> One to the Peaceful Sea; "

and *The Crooked Footpath* bears, though under a different form, the very message of the parable of the mote and the beam.

> " No earth-born will
> Could even trace a faultless line;
> Our truest steps are human still,
> To walk unswerving were divine!
>
> " Truants from love, we dream of wrath: —
> Oh, rather let us trust thee more!
> Through all the wanderings of the path
> We still can see our Father's door! "

Towards all religious sects and beliefs Holmes, liberal though he was, exhibited the broadest sympathy. If in *The Moral Bully* he was justly impatient with the two-faced bigot, as he called one who preached a doctrine that served but to tear " the charter of the shuddering soul," he did not fail to express elsewhere his sincere admiration of the priest who, perplexed by the critic's dangerous art, could still beat back his doubts and take a firmer stand upon his faith. In *A Birthday Tribute*, addressed to James Freeman Clarke, the Unitarian minister, Holmes himself a Unitarian in belief, expressed, as might be expected, his un-

qualified adherence to the simplest of creeds, "God is over all"; yet passage after passage might be quoted from other poems to show his sympathetic and appreciative understanding of more elaborate forms of faith and order, whether Anglican, Calvinistic, or Roman. Finally it may be pointed out in this connection that probably no other American poet ever made so strong a plea for the Jew. In the poem *At the Pantomime* Holmes mentioned an instance of that shrinking from the descendants of Abraham which has developed into an instinct with many who profess and call themselves Christians. Steeling himself at first against his neighbors, — for Holmes told the story as though it were an incident in his own life, — he looked by chance upon the boy beside him to see

> "A fresh young cheek whose olive hue
> The mantling blood shows faintly through;
> Locks dark as midnight, that divide
> And shade the neck on either side;
> Soft, gentle, loving eyes that gleam
> Clear as a starlight mountain stream: —
> So looked that other child of Shem,
> The Maiden's Boy of Bethlehem!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "A sudden mist, a watery screen,
> Dropped like a veil before the scene;
> The shadow floated from my soul,
> And to my lips a whisper stole. —
> 'Thy prophets caught the Spirit's flame,
> From thee the Son of Mary came,
> With thee the Father deigned to dwell, —
> Peace be upon thee Israel!'"

Charity with Holmes by no means reached the end in sympathetic understanding of another's point of view; to him love, like faith to Saint James, if it hath not works, is dead. More than once and in more than one rhetorical figure, Holmes laid stress upon the thought that deeds are the highest form of service. In *The Promise* he did not hesitate to assert that the tears which soothe another's woe have washed the Master's feet; and in *The World's Homage*, one of two poems addressed to Harriet Beecher Stowe, although admitting that the nun repeating her rosary does well, he goes on to say, —

> " But she who serves the sufferer's needs,
> Whose prayers are spelt in loving deeds,
> May trust the Lord will count her beads
> As well as human fingers."

Again and again in his poetry he pointed out to members of his own medical profession that as the main reward immediately accruing to the physician is the consciousness of having eased a sufferer's pain, of having brought back the smile to lips parched with fever, of having restored light to reason darkened for a time; so the chief recompense the future holds will be the hearing of the gracious words,

> " Ye served your brother, ye have served the Lord."

Clearly the chief of the Christian virtues reached perfection to Holmes's mind only in becoming practical; true charity he felt goeth about doing

good. Still, of his own work among his fellow-men he thought but humbly — too humbly in fact. Certainly in him Charity did not vaunt itself; neither was it puffed up, nor did it behave itself unseemly. Though he must have known how highly and how widely he was honored as physician, teacher, author, and friend, he took even in his later years but little credit for all that he had accomplished for humanity. The most that his modesty and sincerity would permit him to say for himself at the age of seventy, he recorded in *The Iron Gate.* There we read,

> " If word of mine another's gloom has brightened,
> Through my dumb lips the heaven-sent message came;
> If hand of mine another's task has lightened,
> It felt the guidance that it dared not claim."

The third and final article in Holmes's very simple creed was a firm belief in the immortality of the soul. Apparently, however, he came but slowly and only by degrees to the conclusion that he could accept the doctrine as true. In *The Cambridge Churchyard* written when the author was twenty-seven years of age, the fundamental thought is not more than this: we die, we pass away, and in time we are forgotten. Even in *Urania,* read ten years later, Holmes could not go much further than to inquire, " Does life's summer see the end of all? " True, in the same poem, he did hasten to admit that rather than give an affirmative and hopeless answer to his question, he would prefer to cherish the Athenian's creed,

the Moslem's view of paradise, or the Indian's dream of happy hunting grounds, yet neither in *Urania*, nor in any of Holmes's poems during the succeeding decade can the reader find a passage expressive of the conviction that the soul survives the body. It may be safe to conclude perhaps, that the attitude of Holmes as a young man can be determined from a study of *Wind Clouds and Star-Drifts*. Although that poem was not completed until 1872, the young astronomer, its supposed author, may in all probability be regarded as giving voice to thoughts which years before had been those of Holmes himself. The young scientist quite ignored the question of the persistence of the soul after death, plainly because he had no convictions to express. At first, indeed, he was eager that his name might be linked throughout the immemorial years with some unforgettable discovery; yet after a time, he was content to think of himself as becoming wholly unknown to mankind, if his work might but continue forever.

The belief that a man's work may be immortal, though he himself may wholly die, cannot long satisfy the heart, cannot completely still the longing for a continuance of personal consciousness after death. The pathos of the lines written in memory of James Dutton Russell,

> "I only knew he loved me well,
> He loved me — and is gone!"

is the greater, because they contain no suggestion, no expression of hope that love persists forever.

Neither do memory and imagination, work together as they will to make the dead seem near, succeed in producing lasting satisfaction. Heart and brain both reach out to touch something more tangible — if the word will be allowed — than anything which the fancy can create. Insist as Holmes did at the several meetings of his classmates that the fifty-eight of the class of '29 were all together, that at the side of every chair a shadow hovered, that the dead seemed listening as of old, he was enabled to utter such a thought year after year "as each dear companion dropped smiling away," only because he had learned to say, as in *A Poem* written for the dedication of the Pittsfield Cemetery; —

> "Take them, O Father, in immortal trust!
> Ashes to ashes, dust to kindred dust
> Till the last angel rolls the stone away,
> And a new morning brings eternal day!"

Death, as Holmes once fancifully said, may indeed be the stern Landlord whom at length we must all obey;

> "And earth's brown clinging lips may press
> The long cold kiss that waits us all;"

yet the certainty of life eternal is behind the lines entitled *In Memory of Charles Upham* and addressed to his mother,

> "O Mary! one who bore thy name,
> Whose Friend and Master was divine,
> Sat waiting silent till He came,
> Bowed down in speechless grief like thine.

" ' Where have ye laid him? ' 'Come,' they say,
Pointing to where the loved one slept;
Weeping, the sister led the way —
And, seeing Mary, ' Jesus wept.'

" He weeps with thee, with all that mourn,
And He shall wipe thy streaming eyes,
Who knew all sorrows, woman-born —
Trust in His word; thy dead shall rise! "

Manifestly, death in the opinion of the maturer Holmes, is not the end of life. Even in his contemplation of the distant period when all the hosts of heaven shall be dissolved, when the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll and every mountain and island moved out of their places, he quaintly thought of the beginning of that inevitable cataclysm as the dawning of the great commencement day on every sea and shore, when all mankind shall be summoned to the taking of their last degree. If at times he wavered in his certainty that the soul lives forever, he could not give up his hope that death would act the part of the Prompter and call us, even though the curtain fall upon the drama of life, to fairer scenes and brighter day. The same thought was in his mind, though he used another figure, when he wrote in memory of James Russell Lowell,

" Thou shouldst have sung the swan-song for the choir
That filled our groves with music till the day
Lit the last hilltop with its reddening fire,
And evening listened for thy lingering lay.

" But thou hast found thy voice in realms afar
Where strains celestial blend their notes with thine;
Some cloudless sphere beneath a happier star
Welcomes the bright-winged spirit we resign."

Such conscious immortality Holmes felt to be the only fitting outcome of the life which he knew Lowell had led. Indeed to Holmes, life, if one live it worthily, was, in a very large and noble sense, but the portal to a grander home. He looked with sympathetic pity upon what he termed Burns's " life of wasteful self-surrender "; he saw clearly, as he showed plainly in *Sun and Shadow,* that each man must work out his own salvation without regard to what others think. In the strangely beautiful poem *The Living Temple,* he contemplated the human body as a cathedral in which man prepares himself to take on a heavenly form; and in *The Chambered Nautilus,* he urged, he still urges, — for his works live after him — the soul to build itself more stately mansions year by year until it may at length depart, leaving its outgrown shell by life's unresting sea. Unwavering trust indeed was his when he looked out from his pinnacle of more than ninety years. Well might he so look forward, since for him, no less than for Whittier to whom he addressed the words — since for him, no less than for all men who have fought the good fight,

" Brighter than earth's morning ray
Streams the pure light of Heaven's unsetting sun,
The unclouded dawn of life's immortal day! "

VIII

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

Lowell, because he was like Holmes, a humorist, has sometimes failed of the recognition which he deserves. He has indeed been occasionally passed over more lightly than his fellow-poet, on the score that Holmes, however sparkling he might have been at times, was always self-restrained; whereas Lowell, on the contrary, not infrequently let his wit run riot. Be that as it may, under the succession of puns that rollic through *A Fable for Critics*, and beneath the whimsical pedantry of the Reverend Homer Wilbur and the ridiculous illiteracy of Hosea Biglow in *The Biglow Papers*, there is a substratum of firm common-sense which shows Lowell, despite his fun, to have been well endowed with breadth and sanity. The rejection of every humorous line written by him, it might be added, would yet leave us a body of serious poems hardly less extensive, certainly not less important than that furnished by Bryant or Emerson. The humorous poems of Lowell, moreover, are so sharply distinguished from his graver work that they may be set aside much more easily than can the similar work of Holmes, whose genial whimsicalities must be regarded as integral to his presentation of his conception of the life of man,

and possibly even to that of his view of the relation of man to God. Still further, the earlier poems of Lowell, unlike those of Holmes, were all so decidedly serious in tone, and dealt in such way and to such an extent with the foundations of religious faith, that one finds in Lowell's work not a growth or an evolution as in Holmes's, but rather a steady advancement to clearer definition.

The lines which chronologically stand first in the collected poems of Lowell are entitled *Threnodia,* those which hold the last place bear the heading, *On a Bust of General Grant.* The earlier poem, although it ends in a conventional and perfunctory intimation of immortality, cannot be regarded as more than a skillful expression of sympathetic understanding of a mother's grief over the loss of her child; the other, it is true, does not in itself contain a single word suggestive of a belief in eternal life, yet its tone is so nearly that of numerous allied poems — such as *Kossuth, To Lamartine, Under the Old Elm,* and the *Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration* — that the reader immediately thinks of Lowell as really predicting for Grant that enduring influence for good which he before asserted of the heroes of other nations and of our own Washington and Lincoln. Between the writings of these two poems, a period of more than half a century intervened, and in that time Lowell repeatedly struggled with the great problem of the immortality of the soul. Unfortunately, he never reached a solution permanently satisfying to himself. His poems plainly show that he would

gladly have accepted the teachings of Christianity in the matter, yet for some reason he seemed to have been incapable of the act of faith at this point, and consequently only at intervals to have looked upon the persistence of personal consciousness after death as a real possibility.

Lowell, in his attitude towards the doctrine of eternal life, then, may be regarded as a sceptic, always, of course, in the better sense of the term. Unable to accept, he doubted; but he would not deny. He had, indeed, the feeling for immortality, and he repeatedly sought for a definition that could be as satisfactory to his intellect as the idea was pleasing to his heart. In *Rosaline* and in *A Requiem*, both very early in date of composition and both wholly imaginative, he implied that there is much gratification in visualizing the dead as still living among those who are yet in the flesh; somewhat later he reiterated the same idea more emphatically and more circumstantially in the lines entitled *On the Death of a Friend's Child;* and again, a few months later, he made the thought completely his own in *The Changeling*, in *The First Snowfall*, and in *She Came and Went*, three poems written in memory of his daughter Blanche, whose death was the first sharp grief of Lowell's life. This early theory of the poet's, it must be admitted, is not without force. Surely the dead have not lived in vain, if they continue to dwell so vividly in the memory that they call forth the perfection of thought and expression which is found in all three of the poems just mentioned and

lead one to the high calmness of resignation which especially marks the last, —

> " As a twig trembles, which a bird
> Lights on to sing, then leaves unbent,
> So is my memory thrilled and stirred; —
> I only know she came and went.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> " An angel stood and met my gaze,
> Through the low doorway of my tent;
> The tent is struck, the vision stays; —
> I only know she came and went.
>
> " Oh, when the room grows slowly dim,
> And life's last oil is nearly spent,
> One gush of light these eyes will brim,
> Only to think she came and went."

Lowell himself would not have hesitated to admit that an existence which is wholly objective, — that is, wholly dependent upon the visualizing power of vivid memory in the living, — is in no sense immortality in the Christian sense of the term. Putting the matter concretely, one may freely assert that Lowell plainly perceived as the full implication of his doctrine, that his daughter would completely cease to be when his own memory of her should fail. Of others, however, he could quite safely assume a somewhat longer existence. Those who had done heroic deeds in the building of nations, those who had won the martyr's crown in supporting a worthy cause, would live on through the generations, ever inciting the heart of youth to great and noble deeds. As

he expressed himself in the *Commemoration Ode*, he saw that —

" The single deed, the private sacrifice,
So radiant now through proudly-hidden tears,
Is covered up erelong from mortal eyes
With thoughtless drift of the deciduous years;
But that high privilege which makes all men peers,
That leap of heart whereby a people rise
Up to a noble angel's height,
And, flamed on by the Fates, not shrink, but grow more bright,
That swift validity in noble veins,
Of choosing danger and disdaining shame,
Of being set on flame
By the pure fire that flies all contact base
But wraps its chosen with angelic might,
These are imperishable gains,
Sure as the sun, medicinal as light,
These hold great futures in their lusty reins.
And certify to earth a new imperial race."

Still, the immortality which Lowell in these words predicted for the leaders and for the heroic rank and file of the Civil War and which he elsewhere asserted of Torrey and Channing and Shaw, and which among painters he dared assume of Masaccio, and among literary men of Hood and of the many teachers of Bacon, is not a conscious immortality and for that reason gives no final satisfaction. In time, however, Lowell was led to the larger hope.

The death of Lowell's daughter Rose in 1850, of his only son Walter within the next two years, and of his wife within the next three, caused a

cataclysm in the poet's spiritual life. Stunned at first, he eventually built up out of the wrecks a faith which, though often weak and evanescent, nevertheless at intervals gathered strength and thrust itself forward as a reality. How utterly hopeless he was in the first hours of grief may be read in the earliest draft of the lines called *After the Burial;* how effectually he subdued his soul to patient hopefulness is recorded in *Palinode.* Even with the loss of his daughter fresh in mind, Lowell in forwarding a copy of the first poem to a friend attempted to soften its harshness as a reply to a letter of well-meant sympathy by remarking: "Death is a private tutor. We have no fellow-scholars and must lay our lessons to heart alone." These half-apologetic words, however, cannot obscure the distinct agony of soul which, fermenting within him, led him to write,

> "Your logic, my friend, is perfect,
> Your moral most drearily true;
> But since the earth dashed on *her* coffin,
> I keep hearing that, and not you.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "Communion in spirit! Forgive me,
> But I, who am earthly and weak,
> Would give all my incomes from dreamland
> For a touch of her hand on my cheek.
>
> "That little shoe in the corner,
> So worn and wrinkled and brown,
> With its emptiness confutes you,
> And argues your wisdom down."

We may well contrast with this bitterness of spirit the calmness which reigns in *Palinode.* Within a

few days after the death of his wife, Lowell had written, "I can only hope that when I go through the last door that opens for all of us, I may hear her coming step upon the other side." To that hope he later gave, in the poem just named, a most exquisite, a most tender phrasing.

"Two watched yon oriole's pendent dome,
That now is void, and dank with rain,
And one, — oh, hope more frail than foam!
The bird to his deserted home
Sings not, — '*Auf wiedersehen!*'

"The loath gate swings with rusty creak;
Once, parting then, we played at pain;
There came a parting, when the weak
And fading lips essayed to speak
Vainly, — '*Auf wiedersehen!*'

"Somewhere is comfort, somewhere faith,
Though thou in outer dark remain;
One sweet sad voice ennobles death,
And still, for eighteen centuries saith
Softly, — '*Auf wiedersehen!*'

"If earth another grave must bear,
Yet heaven hath won a sweeter strain,
And something whispers my despair,
That, from an orient chamber there,
Floats down, '*Auf wiedersehen!*'

Lowell's vision of immortality never, even momentarily, became so vivid as Bryant's; seldom indeed was it less vague than Emerson's. Although his intense desire for reunion with those whom he had loved and lost, carried him occa-

sionally to the hope expressed in *Palinode*, his more general attitude of mind found reflection in the concluding lines of *The Wind-Harp*: —

" Then from deep in the past, as seemed to me,
The strings gathered sorrow and sang forsaken,
' One lover still waits 'neath the green-wood tree,
But 'tis dark,' and they shuddered, ' where lieth she
Dark and cold! Forever must one be taken? '
But I groaned, ' O harp of all ruth bereft,
This Scripture is sadder, — ' the other left '! "

' There murmured, as if one strove to speak,
And tears came instead; then the sad tones wandered
And faltered among the uncertain chords
In a troubled doubt between sorrow and words;
At last with themselves they questioned and pondered,
' Hereafter? — who knoweth? ' and so they sighed
Down the long steps that led to silence and died."

True, when Lowell gazed round what he called his " hall of portraiture by memory reared," he saw about the faces of his beloved dead " an aureole glow woven of that light that rose on Easter morning "; and again when he thought of that famous Swiss-American naturalist for many years his colleague and friend, he became convinced that if God is, the man who had sought so earnestly and devoutly to know Him was sure to be —

" Somehow, somewhere, imperishable as He,
Not with His essence mystically combined,
As some high spirits long, but whole and free,
A perfected and conscious Agassiz."

Still, however fervent his longing, Lowell made no attempt to picture the details of the life which

follows the separation of the soul from the body. It cannot be maintained that he was in any hour without hope; rather should it be said that at times his vision was clearer than at others. On the whole, the tenderly beautiful lines which, but a few years before his death he wrote at the close of *An Epistle to George William Curtis* defines as accurately as any definition could be accurate his inmost thought upon the doctrine of immortality.

> " I muse upon the margin of the sea,
> Our common pathway to the new To Be,
> Watching the sails, that lessen more and more,
> Of good and beautiful embarked before;
> With bits of wreck I patch the boat shall bear
> Me to that unexhausted Otherwhere,
> Whose friendly-peopled shore I sometimes see,
> By soft mirage uplifted, beckon me,
> Nor sadly hear, as lower sinks the sun,
> My moorings to the past snap one by one."

In strong contrast with the vagueness of Lowell's thought upon immortality stands the vividness of his perceptions of God. He might, according to his mood, accept or question or distrust the doctrines of eternal life, but never by any chance was there a wavering of his faith in the personality and fatherhood of the creator. Like Agassiz, —

> " he had trod
> Outside the plain old path of *God thus spake*,
> But God to him was very God,
> And not a visionary wraith
> Skulking in murky corners of the mind."

At this certainty, it may be well to point out, Lowell did not arrive by intellectual processes

alone. Convinced that a vast world of spirit spreads beyond what he termed the narrow ring of sense, he wrote in *The Footpath*,

> " I envy Science not her feat
> To make a twice-told tale of God; "

and grew impatient in *The Lesson* with the man —

> " who takes
> His consciousness the law to be
> Of all beyond his ken, and makes
> God but a bigger kind of Me."

Still, although plainly apprehending the import of the old time question, "Canst thou by searching find out God?" or that later inquiry of Pilate's, " What is truth? " Lowell ever firmly held that God reveals himself to those who truly wait upon Him. To Lowell

> " Believing that Life's bases rest
> Beyond the probe of chemic test,"

the world seemed in every sense God's world. In the realm of Nature it was, to Lowell's mind, the merciful All-Father who sends down the snow; and in the life of man, it was the same Heavenly Being who visits us, now with blessings that we may in some wise become acquainted with His infinite patience, and now with pain that when

> " Sorrow and sickness, poverty and death
> One after other lift their frowning masks,
> We may behold the seraph's face behind,
> All radiant with the glory and the calm
> Of having looked upon the front of God."

Unwavering as was this faith which Lowell had in God, he was none the less frequently at work strengthening its foundations and adding to its bulwarks. To the challenge presented by the problem of evil, he responded in one of his earliest poems, *L'Envoi*, that Providence shapes the mystic harmony of right and wrong, working out both His own wisdom and our good, — a reply, to the spirit of which he gave, a decade and a half later, in *Villa Franca*, the more triumphant form,

> " Darkness is strong and so is Sin,
> But surely God endures forever! "

Again both to those who point out that men are never at one time in agreement upon the definition of God and to those who dare assert that the rejection of their creed is eternal death, he presented the parable of Ambrose. It seems that the holy monk in mistaken zeal grew impatient with a youth who maintained that to each and every soul, God in His mercy has allowed his several cloud and pillar of fire. Thereupon the young man filling six vessels with water from a brook turned upon Ambrose with the words,

> " As into these vessels the water I pour,
> Then shall one hold less and another more,
> And the water unchanged, in every case,
> Shall put on the figure of the vase;
> O thou who wouldst unity make through strife,
> Canst thou fit this sign to the Water of Life?

> " When Ambrose looked up, he stood alone,
> The youth and the stream and the vases were gone;
> But he knew, by a sense of humbled grace,
> He had talked with an angel face to face,
> And felt his heart changed inwardly,
> As he fell on his knees beneath the tree."

Finally, in this connection, Lowell did not hesitate to admit that since every vision which any man might have of God is that of a human soul, it must at its best be necessarily defective and must therefore as necessarily be constantly changing. This thought indeed was a favorite one with Lowell. It took on an unusually beautiful expression in the opening lines of *Rhoecus;* it was cast into more rugged form in *Anti-Apis;* it was almost banteringly presented in *Credidimus Jovem Regnare;* and, in the terse yet none the less perfect line,

> " Each age must worship its own thought of God, "

it became the key-note of *The Cathedral*, probably the most remarkable philosophic poem in American Literature.

God to Lowell, no less than to Saint Paul, was One in whom we live and move and have our being. That we are His offspring, Lowell held quite as firmly as those poets of Greece whom the apostle to the Gentiles quoted approvingly; and that we may feel after Him and find Him since He is not far from any one of us, Lowell could believe as sincerely as did Dionysius the Areopagite, the woman named Damaris, and the other converts

who listened to a certain memorable address delivered from the midst of Mars Hill. Every nation, Lowell asserted, had its lesson from on high; and each, as he expressed it, was "the Messiah of some central thought for the fulfilment and delight of Man." One may teach the lesson, that Labor is divine; another, Freedom; and still another, Mind: yet they unite as a chorus in maintaining the thought, grander and nobler than any one of them by itself possesses, that God is open-eyed and just, the happy center and calm heart of all. How certain Lowell was of God's abiding love and of His willingness to admit His offspring into intimacy with Him may best be read in the concluding lines of *The Cathedral*, —

> "If sometimes I must hear good men debate
> Of other witness of Thyself than Thou,
> . . . . . .
> My soul shall not be taken in their snare,
> To change her inward surety for their doubt
> Muffled from sight in formal robes of proof:
> While she can only feel herself through Thee,
> I fear not Thy withdrawal; more I fear,
> Seeing, to know Thee not, hoodwinked with dreams
> Of signs and wonders, while, unnoticed, Thou,
> Walking Thy garden still, commun'st with men,
> Missed in the commonplace of miracle."

Firm as was Lowell's faith in God, it was not more essentially Christian than was his thought of immortality. Indeed his attitude towards many important religious ideas may not unjustly be termed pagan, — nobly pagan of course, for Lowell

may well be associated with those philosophers of the ancient world whom Dean Farrar aptly called "seekers after God." He could not bring himself to feel that the Church and the Bible speak with authority, yet he was far from sneering at the claims of the former or thrusting the latter aside as valueless. On the other hand, although he readily acknowledged the importance of many conclusions reached by science, he could not admit that all truth was in her keeping or even attainable through her methods. Nature, history, and the heart of man, all were his teachers, and to each of them in turn he listened devoutly until there rose within him as there had arisen within the lady described in the poem called *Irené*,

> "The deep religion of a tranquil heart,
> Which rests instinctively in Heaven's clear law
> With a full peace, that never can depart
> From its own steadfastness."

In one of his earliest poems, *The Beggars*, as again in *The Nomades* written after an interval of twenty years, Lowell made it clear that to his mind Nature is not without power to teach high morality and noble conduct, and to lead the willing soul to God. In *Bibliolatries* he pointed out that history is not fairly read by those who bow in dust before a book and think the great God is theirs alone. True, he once alluded to the Bible as God's own holy word, and throughout his poetry gave evidence of his minute acquaintance with the contents of the Old and the New Testaments; yet how strongly he

felt that divine revelation is not recorded in the pages of Scripture alone, but may be read no less clearly elsewhere, is evident in the concluding lines of the poem last named,

> " Slowly the Bible of the race is writ,
> And not on paper leaves nor leaves of stone;
> Each age, each kindred adds a verse to it,
> Texts of despair or hope, of joy or moan.
> While swings the sea, while mists the mountains shroud,
> While thunder's surges burst on cliffs of cloud,
> Still at the prophet's feet the nations sit."

So far as the Church as a source of truth is concerned, Lowell, although he commented in the two poems, *Letter from Boston* and *A Fable for Critics*, upon the strange inconsistencies in many who profess and call themselves Christians, could not be blind to the no other than miraculous power which that great institution has had upon the soul of man. He might ask the question, " Is old time faith but a spectre now, haunting the solitude of darkened minds? " yet as he looked upon a woman kneeling at prayer, that question was by a kindlier thought rebuked, pleading for whatsoever touches life with upward impulse. Thus he found himself far from certain that science has found the key which religion, once possessing, seems at times to have lost. Sceptical though he was at times, he never approached other than reverently any shrine whatsoever that " gives the soul a moment's truce of God." Pausing before the cathedral in Chartres, he did indeed ask whether Faith or Fear built that

mighty pile, yet he could not be insensible to the message which seemed to issue from the benignant lips of sculptured saints and kings: —

> "Ye come and go incessant, we remain
> Safe in the hallowed quiet of the past;
> Be reverent, ye who flit and are forgot,
> Of faith so nobly realized as this."

Of Christ as more than an historic figure we have nothing in the poems of Lowell — or if more, as in *A Christmas Carol*, and *The Vision of Sir Launfal*, then no more than the adoption of tradition as material lending itself readily to poetic uses. So permeated, however, is the work of Lowell by the spirit of the teachings of Christ that, though he may appear, though he may indeed be sceptical at times and pagan at others, he yet must be reckoned with him of whom Jesus said to his disciples, "He who is not against us is for us." Lowell indeed seldom identified Christ with the man of Galilee, rather did he think of Him as the embodiment of that simple, yet all-sufficient theory of life which that very man of Galilee taught many centuries ago to the little band who having ears to hear did hear, and having heard did understand. As a result of this vivid realization of the essential teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, Lowell arrived at a vision of Christ far more clear than that reached by many who never question the assertions of church or creed. In *The Search*, in *The Miner*, and still more strongly in *A Parable*, Lowell laid stress upon the means whereby the soul of man reaches out

and touches the hem of the garments of the Lord. The hasty reader may contend that Lowell's discovery that Christ is found less frequently in the cathedral, the palace, or the judgment hall than in the hovels of the very poor, is nothing new. Nor, indeed, can any one assert that it is novel. On the contrary, it is as old as Christianity itself and has been reiterated in countless forms since Jesus himself first stated it in the well-known words, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Despite the simplicity of the doctrine, however, its advancement in nineteen hundred years has been but slow; nor will Lowell's presentation of it much hasten its progress. Nevertheless the fact remains that Lowell more nearly than any other American poet has succeeded, perhaps quite unconsciously to himself, in portraying Christ, not as what He is to many a man, a figure shining dimly from out the past, but as what He is to the few truly faithful, an ever-living, omnipresent personality.

Though it is far from probable that Lowell ever looked upon Jesus as the Christ, that is, as God incarnate, he evidently regarded His teachings as offering the best possible ideals and the most practical rules for the conduct of life. The second commandment of Jesus, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," took on many forms in Lowell's verse, but never did it suffer change in substance or in spirit. He might say in *Love*,

" True love is but a humble low-born thing,
And hath its food served up in earthen ware;
It is a thing to walk with, hand in hand,
Through the every-dayness of this work-day world;"

yet he meant thereby not to belittle love, rather to exalt it. Love, he admitted, might have no more than a narrow beginning but he did not fail to point out, —

" That love for one from which there doth not spring
Wide love for all, is but a worthless thing."

So firmly, indeed, did he believe in the doctrine of the brotherhood of man that by no other American poet, save Whitman perhaps, was it more insistently or more convincingly taught. It underlay his life-long hostility to capital punishment, his fierce denunciation of slavery, his soul-stirring deploration of war. It is hinted at in *The Forlorn* and *The Finding of the Lyre*, it is emphasized in *Hunger and Cold* and *The Ghost-Seer*, and it is the informing thought in *The Heritage* and *Godminster Chimes*. Turn where we may, it shines dimly or brightly on almost every page of Lowell's poetry. Perhaps its most direct, though by no means most poetic presentation, may be found in *The Fatherland*, one of Lowell's earliest experiments in verse. The concluding stanzas read: —

" Where'er a human heart doth wear
Joy's myrtle-wreath or sorrow's gyves,
Where'er a human spirit strives
After a life more true and fair,
There is the true man's birthplace grand,
His is a world-wide fatherland!

> " Where'er a single slave doth pine,
> Where'er one man may help another, —
> Thank God for such a birthright, brother,—
> That spot of earth is thine and mine!
> There is the true man's birthplace grand,
> His is a world-wide fatherland! "

Lowell's belief that no man's interests can properly be limited to one's immediate family, or to the circle in which one moves socially, or even to the nation of which one is a citizen, but must, if one would reach one's full development, be as far-reaching as the blue heaven itself, is a natural outcome of the principle asserted quite simply in *A Fable for Critics*, " that man is a moral, accountable being." Holding that the responsibilities of man when regarded as his brother's keeper, are neither light nor few; and readily accepting as final the saying of Jesus that unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required, Lowell did not hesitate to urge the cultivation of the virtues, or to utter warnings against the seductive loveliness which vice often puts on, or to sound frequent trumpet calls to duty. In *The Beggar*, he pictured himself as going to the woods to learn steadfastness from the oak, endurance from the granite, serenity from the pine, joyousness from the brook, and modesty from the violet; in *Extreme Unction*, he showed how pitiable the soul becomes when it remorsefully looks back to the loss of innocent or the deliberate rejection of the ideal; in *The Sirens*, he dwelt upon the subtle enervating charm wherewith the thought of

happiness and ease coaxingly transforms activity into slothfulness and death; and in his sonnets he repeatedly gave expression in one form or another to the exhortation,

> "Be noble! and the nobleness that lives
> In other men, sleeping, but never dead,
> Will rise in majesty to meet thine own."

Again in *The Parting of the Ways* and in *The Washers of the Shroud*, he laid stress upon the gain which comes from obedience; in *Dara* and in *Mahmood, the Image Breaker*, he pointed out how surely humility and steadfastness are crowned with reward; in *A Parable*, in *Longing*, and in *The Vision of Sir Launfal*, he made it clear how long abiding are faith, hope, and charity; and in *Columbus* and in *Seaweed*, he emphasized the satisfaction which in the long run visits those who resting in the Lord, wait patiently upon Him until He giveth them their heart's desire.

Although in the early poem, *Summer Storm*, Lowell saw fit to speak of life as a confused noise between two silences, he nevertheless gave evidence throughout his work that he believed spiritual attainments are secured, not by chance, but only through the conscious self-activity of the soul. Love, he admitted in *Rhœcus*, is ever merciful and can forgive, but he did not hesitate to add that it has no power to heal blindness of spirit, since the soul alone has power over itself. It is true, no doubt, that

> " God's love and man's are of the self-same blood,
> And He can see that always at the door
> Of foulest hearts the angel-nature yet
> Knocks to return and cancel all its debt; "

it is probably equally true that even in the prison, the slave-hut, and the alleys of sin the divine in human nature is never completely trampled out, yet the great deeds of life are little likely to be accomplished by any soul —

> " But sees visions, knows wrestlings of God with the Will,
> And has its own Sinais and thunderings still."

Every man according to Lowell's *Above and Below* has work to do, whether his place be on the mountain height or in the valley land. Life, it is said, in the *Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration* may be given in many ways: one man with wiser ear may divine amid the battle-din some text of God and find himself called thereby to front a lie in arms; another may see no less plainly that loyalty to truth is often sealed " as bravely in the closet as the field, so bountiful is fate."

Whatever one's walk in life may be, Lowell was quite certain that sooner or later one is called upon to meet a crisis, to make a choice, and in performing that act to hasten or retard the progress of the world. As early as 1844 when America was torn with dissension over the annexation of Texas, Lowell taking in *The Present Crisis* the side of justice, sounded the warning, —

"Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight,
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right,
And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that light."

Thirty years later, in a calmer time, he reiterated the same thought. If the words in *Under the Old Elm* are less stirring, as perhaps befitted the rejoicing at the completion of a hundred years of our nation's history, they are not less convincing,

"The man's whole life preludes the single deed
That shall decide if his inheritance
Be with the sifted few of matchless breed,
Our race's sap and sustenance,
Or with the unmotived herd that only sleep and feed.
Choice seems a thing indifferent; thus or so,
What matters it? The Fates with mocking face
Look on inexorable, nor seem to know
Where the lot lurks that gives life's foremost place.
Yet Duty's leaden casket holds it still,
And but two ways are offered to our will,
Toil with rare triumph, ease with safe disgrace,
The problem still for us and all of human race."

Persistent though Lowell was in laying emphasis upon work and production as assisting the soul to make its way towards perfection, he saw quite as clearly as Browning, that the test of a man is not so much what he actually accomplishes as what he

earnestly strives to do. Over against the English poet's often-quoted line,

> "'Tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what man would do!"

we may well place a stanza of the American writer's lines *For an Autograph*, —

> "Greatly begin! though thou have time
> But for a line, be that sublime, —
> Not failure, but low aim is crime."

In the sonnet called *The Street*, Lowell drew a picture of a singing crowd, every man in which was but a ghost, since sometime in the past each one had trampled on youth and faith and love, and cast all hope of human-kind aside. Self-centered, each had striven against Heaven's clear message and conquered, only to find his spirit turned to clay. In *The Rose* the poet did not hesitate to admit that hate and scorn and hunger follow close upon the footsteps of him who sacrifices himself for his fellow-man; but none the less he firmly insisted that —

> "Strength and wisdom only flower
> When we toil for all our kind."

The final test of the soul to Lowell's mind is always the choice which it makes among the things of this world. In *St. Michael the Weigher*, he pictures himself as standing in the presence of the

arch-angel and watching him as he places now on one side of the balance, now on the other, the many hopes of man.

> "In one scale I saw him place
> All the glories of our race,
> Cups that lit Belshazzar's feast,
> Gems, the lightning of the East,
> Kublai's sceptre, Cæsar's sword,
> Many a poet's golden word,
> Many a skill of science, vain
> To make men as gods again.
>
> "In the other scale he threw
> Things regardless, outcast, few,
> Martyr-ash, arena-sand,
> Of St. Francis' cord a strand,
> Beechen cups of men whose need
> Fasted that the poor might feed,
> Disillusions and despairs
> Of young saints with grief-grayed hairs,
> Broken hearts that brake for Man."

To the clear-eyed Lowell there was no question of what the choice of man should be. Yet confident as he was of the truth of his vision, he did not fail to see how often his weaker brethren hesitated to press onward in the rugged and forbidding paths of duty when the fields of pleasure spread out invitingly before them. To such he frequently addressed himself, urgently exhorting them to lay hold upon the things which endure forever. At times indeed he spoke almost as one having authority and not as the scribes and Pharisees. Certainly the mandate which stands at the close

of the noble lines entitled *Prometheus* are hardly less than scriptural in tone and import.

"Good never comes unmixed, or so it seems,
Having two faces, as some images
Are carved, of foolish gods; one face is ill;
But one heart lies beneath, and that is good,
As are all hearts when we explore their depths.
Therefore, great heart, bear up! thou art but type
Of what all lofty spirits endure, that fain
Would win men back to strength and peace through love,
Each hath his lonely peak, and on each heart
Envy, or scorn, or hatred, tears lifelong
With vulture beak; yet the high soul is left;
And faith, which is but hope grown wise, and love,
And patience which at last shall overcome."

IX

WALT WHITMAN

Whitman has not yet been given his final place among American poets. That he is to have a permanent position there ceased to be doubted as soon as it was discovered over half a century ago, that he could not be either wholly rejected or completely ignored. From the moment he wrote among his many introductory inscriptions to *Leaves of Grass* the challenging words:

> " Shut not your doors to me proud libraries;
> For that which was lacking on all your well-fill'd shelves, yet needed most, I bring,"

he pressed unflinchingly forward, and long before his death succeeded in firmly establishing himself within walls which had only reluctantly admitted him. Nevertheless, he still presents a problem. What is to be done with a singer whose voice cannot be brought to accord with others in the choir? Where among those who are most carefully selective of subject matter and most pains-taking in expression, shall we place a self-professed singer who is quite indifferent to the long accepted rules of taste bounding the poet's field of thought and limiting the poet's choice of diction? Where indeed shall such a writer be assigned, that he may

not detract from the impression which his fellow-poets rightly make, and — to be just — that he may not himself suffer through comparison with them? Many an attempt has been made at meeting such questions as these in connection with Whitman; none, as yet, has been successful more than moderately. When it is said that Whitman never wrote a single poetic line, the critic is reduced to silence by the citation of the beautiful phrase in *Come up from the Fields, Father*,

> " Where apples ripe in the orchards hang and grapes on the trellis'd vines;"

or by the quotation of that stately passage in *Song of the Exposition*,

> " Blazon'd with Shakspere's purple page,
> And dirged by Tennyson's sweet sad rhyme."

When, on the other hand, one grows enthusiastic over the nobility, the uplift of Whitman's message, he is forced to an apologetic attitude at the mention of poems marred in their thought by coarse passion, in their expression by repulsive words. The truth probably lies somewhere in the midst of these diverse criticisms. The fact of the matter is that the final test to which Whitman must eventually be subjected has not yet been devised, — if, indeed, it ever can be. Weighed in the balance which adequately serves to determine the true worth of other American poets, he simply breaks the scales. Some new method of evaluating him

must therefore be found; and until it is found — perhaps even after it is found — he will remain unique in American Literature, — some will have it, in all literature.

Wordsworth's dictum, that the poet must himself create the taste by which he is judged, is illuminating at this point. It proved true in his case; it afterwards proved no less true in Tennyson's and Browning's. Why may it not prove true in Whitman's? Certainly the Camden Sage was only recasting — probably quite unconsciously — the thought of the English poet, when he wrote,

"I make the only growth by which I can be appreciated."

Whatever general appreciation may be accorded Whitman, he offers to the hasty reader but a barren outlook from the religious point of view. At first glance, indeed, he seems to promise far less in that direction than did Poe, although no one can deny that the sweep of his horizon line is much greater than that which hemmed in the author of *The Raven*. Furthermore, one will almost surely be warned away by at least two classes of persons among Whitman's admirers, those who object to an interpreter and those who object to any attempt at interpretation. The former will support themselves by quoting from *Myself and Mine*,

"I charge you, forever reject those who would expound me,
for I cannot expound myself,
I charge you to leave all free, as I have left all free;

the latter will offer in their defense the passage in *Calamus*,

> "I will certainly elude you,
> Even while you should think you had unquestionably caught me, behold!
> Already you see I have escaped from you."

The implied objections are valid, the quotations are apposite; for the interpreter of Whitman risks a hazardous enterprise. "Writing about him," said Mr. John Addington Symonds, "is enormously difficult; . . . it is like talking about the universe," a remark echoed somewhat colloquially a few years ago by an American critic in the words, "As soon as I have said anything about Walt Whitman, I am quite sure that I ought to have said something else." Nevertheless, recalling that Mr. John Burroughs, the poet's very true friend and perhaps sanest defender, has maintained that of the two or three great passions which swayed Whitman, his religious feeling was doubtless chief, one feels privileged to make some attempt at an analysis, though certain that the final word cannot yet be said, of what Whitman's religious thought really was. That the good gray poet had little if any sympathy with what is called revealed religion must be admitted at the outset, yet advancement upon him from that direction is certainly fair, since if he is to be understood at all, he must be explained in terms having popular acceptation. We may therefore respectfully approach this poet, this man who in the earliest draft of *Song of the Broad-Age* boldly described himself as

"Arrogant, masculine, naïve, rowdyish,
Laugher, weeper, worker, idler, citizen, country-man,
Saunterer of woods, stander upon hills, summer-swimmer in rivers or by the sea,
Of pure American breed, of reckless health — ample-limbed,
Countenance sunburnt, bearded, calm, unrefined,
Reminder of animals, meeter of savage and gentleman on equal terms,
. . . . . .
Enterer everywhere, welcomed everywhere, easily understood after all, —
Teacher of the unquenchable creed, namely egotism,
Inviter of others continually henceforth to try their strength against his," —

we may respectfully approach him and seriously inquire what religion meant to him in general, and what force there was for him in such particular terms as God, Soul, Life, Death, and Immortality.

Before undertaking to give, much less to discuss, Whitman's definition of these terms, one must remove certain obstructions which obscure them. No inconsiderable body of writing contained in *Leaves of Grass* should first be cast aside on the ground that, whatever defense may be made of its expression, its subject-matter is of such a nature as to place it beneath consideration as poetry in any sense of the term. Furthermore, another large cantle must be shorn away, as was the case with Emerson, on the score that it is philosophic rather than religious. And finally the indictment often made against Whitman that he is an arch-egoist must be quashed.

It has been said quite seriously that Whitman frequently wrote as if he thought himself the first person to discover that all men are naked underneath their clothes. The objection implied in these words can hardly be gainsaid. There is a great deal of Whitman's work that cannot but be repulsive, — nauseating indeed — to every right-thinking reader. Obscenity is not virility, neither is coarseness necessarily strength. On the contrary, their presence is, more often than not, a sign of weakness. Modesty is never long humiliated by the accusation of prudishness: her pride returns and successfully withstands those who sneer against her. Decency and virtue are absolute verities in spite of the question which jesting Pilate would not stay to hear answered. It follows, therefore, that to defend on any conceivable ground all that Whitman wrote, is to fight for a cause which is wholly without dignity and honor. When he boastingly disrobed in the light of day, he was not merely naked and unashamed, not merely barbaric; he was degenerate. It is not enough for a partisan of Whitman to point out that there is nothing in *Leaves of Grass* inconsistent with the author's point of view. It is true that there is not; but, unfortunately the outlook from that point of view happens to include no little territory which ordinary common-sense would silently cleanse of noxious growths instead of exploiting it as bearing life-giving fruits and healthful grain. The advocate for Whitman loses the case for his client when he piles up such quotations as these:

"Of physiology from top to toe I sing, —

. . . . . .

I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also, —

. . . . . .

In all people I see myself, none more and not one barley-corn less;
And the good and evil I say of myself I say of them."

Such evidence proves too much. By it, out of his own mouth is Whitman convicted. Nothing remains but to pass judgment. The real trouble with Whitman was that he lacked a sense of balance. Possessed of an exuberant intellect, he had no feeling for relative values, he placed the stamp of approval upon everything which he produced. That he needed to be saved from himself, Emerson, who saw much of Whitman's work in manuscript, plainly perceived; but the wise New Englander labored with his perverse friend in vain. Whitman indeed has only himself to blame that many of his "barbaric yawps" — his own word for his utterances — must be ruled out of court in any trial. Certainly much that he wrote has no bearing upon any acceptable theory of life, no connection with anything truly religious.

The other hindrances to a clear view of Whitman's religious thought — his strictly philosophical poems and his alleged egotism — may each be briefly disposed of. Although Whitman's philosophy and religion are quite as closely interwoven as are Emerson's, a considerable number of poems, of which *Eidólons* furnishes a fair example, can be

placed at one side as offering little or no help in the search here undertaken. A few words of comment, however, are not out of place in passing. Mr. Burroughs has said, " Whitman was Emerson translated from the abstract into the concrete." That statement may be accepted perhaps; yet the philosophy of Whitman differs greatly from that of his friend: Emerson's shows at least a basic unity and can be reduced to three or four fundamental principles quite reconcilable with one another, Whitman's, in strong contrast, is as varying as the winds that blow. He is more frankly materialistic than anything else, yet not infrequently he is clearly idealistic too. He is sometimes pantheistic, sometimes theistic. Students of the much differing Bergson and Nietzsche, moreover, have pointed to elements which he has in common with each. Whitman himself was not unconscious of these incongruities, and recast Emerson's remark in *Self-Reliance*, " A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines," into the three lines in *Song of Myself*.

> " Do I contradict myself?
> Very well then I contradict myself,
> (I am large, I contain multitudes.)"

Interesting as these facts may be, there is no possibility of bringing the many diverse voices into any single chorus, much less into harmony with the song of religion.

Closely connected with Whitman's philosophy and possibly with his religion, strange as it may seem, is the charge of egotism which is frequently brought against him. Bayard Taylor did not hesitate to advance it over half a century ago, and there has never been a time since, when it has not been issuing from some quarter. The unfortunate result has ensued that Whitman is not so widely read as he should be, for we seem to be so constituted that we seldom listen patiently to any man who arrogates authority to himself. As a matter of fact, although the charge brought against Whitman is strictly true in the letter, it is all but wholly false in the spirit. The pronoun I, no doubt, does thickly bestrew the pages of *Leaves of Grass*, yet any thoughtful reader must see that when Whitman speaks in the first person, or when he names a poem *Me Imperturbe* or *Spontaneous Me*, or *Myself and Mine*, he is rarely thrusting himself forward. Instead, he is really representing all mankind, he is speaking as the mouthpiece of the race; he is, in a true philosophic sense, the microcosm. So explained, many of Whitman's utterances which ordinarily awaken antagonism and others which taken literally are at best repugnant, become attractive and in no few instances helpful and illuminating. It is a mistake to suppose that it was the lyric and therefore strictly personal impulse which made Whitman write as the opening line of *Song of Myself*,

"I celebrate myself, and sing myself,"

That the inspiration was instead epical, and therefore general and for all, is clear from the lines which Whitman elected to stand first in *Leaves of Grass*

> " One's-self I sing, a simple separate person,
> Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> " Of life immense in passion, pulse, and power,
> Cheerful, for freest action formed under laws divine,
> The modern man I sing."

Thus construed, the so-called egotism of Whitman may not wholly vanish — cannot, perhaps, — but it ceases to be the strangling and obscuring smoke which has too long driven back many an honest-minded critic. Especially will such a clearing of the atmosphere be conducive to fairness in an attempt to discover what religion meant to Whitman.

An American critic writing destructively of Whitman not long ago, made the statement that the Camden Sage was irreligious. Had the young man taken pains to read *Leaves of Grass*, he would have known that his arrow stood no chance of hitting the willow. It is true that Whitman himself stated more than once that he had cut loose from churches, ecclesiasticism, creeds, and even Christianity; yet it is clear that his purpose in so separating himself was not that he might have less religion, but that he might have more. Said he in the poem entitled *Starting from Paumanok*,

"I too, following many and follow'd by many, inaugurate a religion, —
I say no man has ever yet been half devout enough,
None has ever yet adored or worship'd half enough, —
Know you, solely to drop in the earth the germs of a greater religion,
The following chants each for its kind I sing: —
For you to share with me two greatnesses, and a third one rising inclusive and more resplendent,
The greatness of Love and Democracy, and the greatness of Religion."

Plainly, Whitman had no thought of rejecting religion. He rather looked upon it as the *summum bonum* of life, as something above and beyond all that science or literature or philosophy or art has to offer; yet, not the less, is religion to him something which the simplest and the meanest may possess equally with those whose lives have fallen in pleasant places. Almost Emersonian in content and diction is the noble prose passage in *Notes (such as they are) founded on Elias Hicks.* "There is something greater (is there not?) than all the science and poems of the world — above all else, like the stars shining eternal — above Shakespeare's plays, or Concord philosophy, or art of Angelo or Raphael, — something that shines illusive, like beams of Hesperus at evening — high above all the vaunted wealth and pride — prov'd by its practical out-cropping in life, each case after its own concomitants — the intuitive blending of divine love and faith in a human emotional character — blending for all, for the unlearned, the common, and the poor." There is nothing to support and much to

refute the assertion that Whitman had little care for religion. He was not a contemner, he did not sit in the seat of the scornful. Rather was he an enthusiast, a prophet convinced of the validity of his new interpretation of old truth. Like Carlyle he felt that beneath all things excellent and eternal is religion, that without it is no man truly manly, no character really noble, no nation great and enduring. "I say" he wrote in the poem but just now quoted, —

"I say that the real and permanent grandeur of these States
must be their religion,
Otherwise there is no real and permanent grandeur;
(Nor character nor life worthy the name religion,
Nor land nor man nor woman without religion)."

Religion to Whitman was not merely a belief, a creed, but a practical theory of life — or, better perhaps, an actual living; it was something more than passive receptivity, it was active conduct day by day, hour by hour. Whitman took a certain delight in shocking, in horrifying the thoughtless by describing himself in *Song of Myself* as

"Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking, and breeding;"

but he must have known, or at least have hoped, that large-minded readers would regard him as accepting quite literally those remarkable words of the founder of Christianity, "The kingdom of God is within you." Whitman's religion was once defined by Mr. Laurens Maynard as "an individ-

ual mystic communion with the divine principle." It is that certainly, but it is more; it is that communion taking form in each day's work. Whitman, no doubt, did hold, as Mr. William Guthrie has asserted, that religion is essentially unsocial. He no doubt expressed himself quite sincerely when he wrote in *Democratic Vistas:* "I should say, indeed, that only in the perfect uncontamination and solitariness of individuality may the spirituality of religion positively come forth at all. Only here, and on such terms, the meditation, the devout ecstasy, the soaring flight. Only here, communion with the mysteries, the eternal problems, whence, whither? . . . Bibles may convey, and priests expound, but it is exclusively for the noiseless operation of one's isolated Self to enter the pure ether of veneration, reach the divine levels, and commune with the unutterable." Still, it must not be forgotten that Whitman held no less that only in companionship, in comradeship does life reach its highest development. Whitman's religion was a new reading, a new interpretation of the teachings of Christ, he had visions of a new heaven and a new earth, and the corner-stone thereof was love. Thus it came about that he could say in *Calamus,* —

"I dream'd in a dream I saw a city invisible to the attacks
of the whole of the rest of the earth,
I dreamed that was the new city of Friends,
Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust love,
it led the rest,
It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of that city,
And in all their looks and words."

Plainly Mr. Burroughs is right when he maintains that Whitman's religion was larger than any creed yet formulated, that its chief elements were faith, hope, and charity, that its object was to prepare one to live, not to die, and, as Whitman himself said, to "earn for the body and the mind what adheres and goes forward, and is not dropped by death." Although it must be admitted that Whitman never gave his religion formal definition or outline, it is easy to discover what he held it truly to be. If one would find phrasing for it, one may turn quite unhesitatingly to a man to whom Whitman was probably no more than a name, — if indeed so much as a name. Whitman's poetry, taken all in all, is a distinct though probably unconscious recognition of the validity of John Stuart Mills' definition of religion as "the strong and earnest direction of the desires and emotions toward an ideal recognized as of the highest excellence."

Whitman's confidence in the reality and authority of religion was based upon an acceptance of two principles which many men have regarded as wholly antagonistic — the reality of the material world which is about us, and the no less equal reality of a world which, though unmaterial, is quite as near. To Whitman, physical and spiritual facts, logical and intuitional methods of reaching conclusions, were of no differing importance. So holding, he was able to arrive at what to him was, and to his followers has become, a satisfactory reconciliation between the teachings of science on one hand and the affirmations of the soul on the

other. He believed that both imparted the same ultimate lesson, and that where there was danger of error, they were mutually corrective. It may be said of him as of no other poet, that he and his writings were the obvious outcome of the work of the chemist, the physicist, and the biologist; yet his pages do not the less bristle with references to activities of the soul, — references far more convincing than many found recorded by theologians of repute. If one recalls that he wrote in *Song of Myself*, —

> " I accept Reality and dare not question it,
> Materialism first and last imbuing, "

one must not forget that in *Starting from Paumanok* he exclaimed,

> " The soul,
> Forever and forever — longer than soil is brown and solid —
> longer than water ebbs and flows."

To Whitman's mind, it is safe to say, science, instead of denying, supported the great intuitions of the soul. He would have been the last to take his stand with Professor Clifford who, as a result of scientific studies, triumphantly boasted, " The Great Companion is dead," rather was he in sympathy with that famous scientist who looking through his telescope upon the myriad stars, was moved to exclaim, " The undevout astronomer is mad."

Whitman did not make frequent use, as did

Tennyson and Browning, of the individual facts and discoveries of the various sciences. His interest was mainly in those larger conclusions which take form as the result of a comparison of the work of men laboring in widely diverse fields. Even here, he had no desire to reconcile the nebular hypothesis or the geologic fact of eons of creation with the first chapter of Genesis; nor was he disturbed by the apparent discrepancy between the theory of evolution and the doctrines of the fall, the redemption, and the salvation of man. If long accepted theological conceptions failed to maintain their position in the face of well attested scientific facts, then so much the worse for those conceptions — they must go. In *Democratic Vistas* he commented on what he called an instructive spectacle and conflict: " Science, testing absolutely all thoughts, all works — a sun, mounting, most illuminating, most glorious — surely never again to set . . . against it deeply entrenched, holding possession — the fossil theology of the mythic-materialistic superstitious, untaught and credulous, fable-loving, primitive ages of humanity." If one shrinks from so bold a recognition of a struggle which no one can deny is going on, one is restored to confidence by another passage which appears in the *Preface of 1872*, " With science, the old theology of the East, long in its dotage, begins evidently to die and disappear. But (to my mind) science — and maybe such will prove its principal service — as evidently prepares the way for one indescribably grander — Time's young but perfect

offspring — lusty and loving and wondrous beautiful. . . . The supreme and final science is the science of God — what we call science being only its minister." Thus Whitman swings full circle, or rather he moves upward on a spiral. He returns, as man always does return, to certain beliefs which are truer to him when he again stands in their presence than they were when he first beheld them; for he now finds them awaiting him on a higher plane.

Two such beliefs were fundamental with Whitman, God and the Immortality of the Soul. Of their truth he was quite as certain as of the most thoroughly authenticated discoveries of science. His sincerity, moreover, is evidenced by the fact that he did not seek reasons for his faith as does many a man who, when doubts assail, buttresses himself for the sake, not so much of his faith, as of his peace of mind. Upon the nature and character of God, Whitman dwelt perhaps less than any other American poet. He was content to accept His existence. Whitman's attitude was that of the new order of priests who, he prophesied in the *Preface of 1855* will yet arise, — priests who " shall not deign to defend immortality, or God, or the perfection of things, or liberty, or the exquisite beauty and reality of the soul." He strove always to be fair, he reiterated many times, " I do not despise you, priests," yet his wonder over the methods followed in many pulpits was ever that which affected him in his early years, and which in later life he recorded in *By the Roadside*, —

" Silent and amazed even when a little boy,
I remember I heard the preacher every Sunday put God in his statements,
As contending against some being or influence."

In a very literal sense God to Whitman was a spirit; and he saw, like the Apostle, that they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. For this reason he refrained from any tendency to make God anthropomorphic and preferred to say, as in *Passage to India*, " with the mystery of God we dare not dally " or better, as in *Song of Myself*, —

" And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God,
For I who am curious about each am not curious about God,
I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least.

" Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then.
I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is sign'd by God's name,
And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er I go,
Others will punctually come for ever and ever."

Nevertheless, despite Whitman's confession that he did not understand God in the least, he somehow, without obvious effort, managed to leave with the readers of his poems a vivid impression of the personality of the Creator and of His infinite goodness. The philosophic poems *Eidólons* and *Chanting the Square Deific* may exist and may even hold

our attention for a time, but they readily give way before numerous lines which make a much more convincing appeal; they are, moreover, utterly driven out of court when that noble passage strongly suggestive of Carlyle at his best, is brought forward from *November Boughs* as a witness:

"What is poor plain George Fox compared to William Shakespeare — to fancy's lord, imagination's heir? Yet George Fox stands for something too — a thought — the thought that wakes in silent hours — perhaps the deepest, most eternal thought latent in the human soul. This is the thought of God, merged in the thoughts of moral right and the immortality of identity. Great, great is this thought — aye, greater than all else. When the gorgeous pageant of Art, refulgent in the sunshine, colored with roses and gold — with all the richest mere poetry, old or new (even Shakespeare's) — with all that statue, play, painting, music, architecture, oratory, can effect, ceases to satisfy and please — when the eager chase after wealth flags, and beauty itself becomes a loathing— and when all worldly or carnal or esthetic or even scientific values, having done their office to the human character, and minister'd their part to its development — then, if not before, comes forth this over-arching thought and brings its eligibilities, germinations much neglected in life of all humanity's attributes, easily covered with crust, deluded and abused, rejected, yet the only certain source of what all are seeking, but few or none find — in it I myself clearly see the first, the last, the

deepest depths, and the highest heights of art, of literature, and of the purposes of life. I say whoever labors here, makes contributions here, or best of all sets an incarnate example here, of life or death, is dearest to humanity — remains after the rest are gone. And here, for these purposes, and up to the light that was in him, the man George Fox lived long, and died, faithful in life, and faithful in death."

The thought of the living God is indeed dominant in both the prose and the poetry of Whitman, yet he found it impossible to regard Him, whom he called in *Song of the Exposition* "The loving Laborer through space and time," as making Himself — as even able to make Himself of no reputation and take upon Himself the likeness of man. Whitman was by no means forgetful of Jesus or his great work in the world, yet only now and then did he allude to Him in his writings. Somewhere, indeed, among Whitman's prose works may be found a passage in which the author undertook to explain in a few words what Christ appeared for, yet he plainly did not regard Him as endowed with divinity. Once, also, in *Chanting the Square Deific*, he made Christ co-equal with Jehovah, who "dispenses judgments inexorable without the least remorse," and with the Santa Spirita, who is "breather, life, beyond the light, lighter than light" and, rather interestingly, with Satan, who "aloof, dissatisfied, plotting revolt, still lives, still utters words, warlike, equal with any, real as any." The poem from which these

phrases are taken is really philosophic and not religious. In it Whitman used the terms Jehovah, Christ, Satan, and Holy Spirit, it is true; but he was trying to show that for the triangle which is sometimes used as a symbol of the Trinity, a square should be substituted, its sides respectively representing the great principles of Law and Judgment, Love and Forgiveness, Rebellion and Evil, and Reconciliation and Union of All in One. Whitman did not elsewhere speak of Christ above four or five times. Three lines from as many pages may be quoted as examples, —

> "Walking the old hills of Judea with the beautiful gentle God by my side," —
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "I see Christ eating the bread of his last supper in the midst of youths and old persons," —
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "I hear the tale of the divine life and bloody death of the beautiful God the Christ."

Separated from their context at least two of these lines — and other parallel expressions might also be quoted — convey the idea that Whitman did indeed believe Christ to be the Son of God; but no such conclusion can be held when the whole poem in which each occurs is taken into consideration. In every case Christ is associated — and in no transcending way — with the gods of the Greeks, the Romans, the Hindoos, and the Druids, just as in a very late poem entitled *Old Chants*, "the deep idylls of the Nazarene," were ranked

with the Hindu epics, the Iliad, the wanderings of Æneas, the Cid, the Nebelungen, the Border Minstrelsy, the plays of Shakspere, the works of Walter Scott, and the poems of Tennyson.

Whitman, however, did write one poem in which his personal, as distinct from his literary attitude toward Jesus may be discovered. It appears in *Autumn Rivulets* and bears the title *To Him that was Crucified.* To say the least, it is startling. One can hardly look upon it as blasphemous, since Whitman was clearly not intentionally irreverent; yet no one of even ordinary refinement, whatever his religious faith may be, can feel that the spirit of *bon camaraderie* which pervades it, is in other than the very worst taste. It is reprinted here simply because it assists, as no other poem can assist, to an understanding of Whitman's theory of Christ, —

" My spirit to yours, dear brother,
Do not mind because many sounding your name do not understand you,
I do not sound your name, but I understand you,
I specify you with joy, O my comrade, to salute you, and to salute those who are with you, before and since, and those to come also,
That we all labor together transmitting the same charge and succession,
We few equals, indifferent of lands, indifferent of times,
We, enclosers of all continents, all castes, allowers of all theologies,
Compassionaters, perceivers, rapport of men,
We walk silent among disputes and assertions, but reject not the disputers nor anything that is asserted,
We hear the bawling and din, we are reach'd at by divisions, jealousies, recriminations on every side,

They close peremptorily upon us to surround us, my comrade,
Yet we walk unheld, free, the whole earth over, journeying up and down till we make our ineffaceable mark upon time and the diverse eras,
Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and women of races, ages to come, may prove brethren and lovers as we are."

The sole passage in which Whitman mentioned the Holy Spirit — that which constitutes the fourth division of *Chanting the Square Deific* — has already been commented upon. The subject itself, however, demands further attention, for Whitman dwelt so frequently upon the affirmations of the soul as being authoritative, that his readers are immediately reminded of Whittier's trust in the authenticity of the Inner Light and Emerson's confidence in the existence of the Over-Soul. The reason for this effect is not far to seek. Whittier was a sincere member of the Society of Friends from the beginning of his days to the end, Emerson openly acknowledged the identity of more than one of his teachings with the faith and practice of the sect founded by George Fox; and Whitman, far as he went afield, was of Quaker descent and seemed never inclined to question the reality of the pleading, compelling voice of the Spirit, which all Quakers regard as final proof that their fundamental doctrines are true. In a footnote to a prose article upon Elias Hicks, Whitman wrote, "The true Christian religion consists in noiseless secret ecstasy and unremitted aspiration," and

a few lines farther on he mentioned the soul of man as " invisibly rapt, ever-waiting, ever responding to universal truth." The idea back of each of these quotations is one, and they themselves may safely be regarded as but the recasting of a passage in one of the paragraphs which stand as a preface to an article already drawn upon, " Always Elias Hicks gives the service of pointing to the fountain of all naked theology, all religion, all worship, all the truth to which you are possibly eligible — namely in *yourself* and your inherent relation. Others talk of Bibles, saints, churches, exhortations, vicarious atonements — the canons outside of yourself and apart from man — Elias Hicks to the religion inside of man's very own nature." Here unquestionably is the very doctrine of the Inner Light, " the vital core," to use Mr. Guthrie's words, " of Quakerism."

Yet one is not held to Whitman's prose writings alone for proof of the belief, expressed in his own words, that " the ideals of character, of justice, of religious action, whenever the highest is at stake, are to follow the inward Duty-planted law of the emotional soul." Whitman's poetry abounds in passages apt to the present subject, that are even more convincing than any in his prose, for the reason that in almost every instance they may be regarded, as indeed they profess to be, utterances of a poet, — or perhaps better, a seer. True, Whitman, like Emerson, delighted in such aphoristic statements as " whatever satisfies souls is true," " All truths wait in all things " and " Only

what proves itself to every man and woman is so" — statements which on account of their terseness seem crammed with wisdom, but which on analysis prove to be but little more than empty sound. Again, he liked to make startling assertions such as these: —

"Behold, the body includes and is the meaning, the main concern, and includes, and is the soul," —

. . . . . .

"The spirit receives from the body just as much as it gives to the body, if not more," —

. . . . . .

"I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul."

The effect of such passages has not been to increase the number of Whitman's readers. Many a man who feels no call to challenge the strikingly parallel thought ascribed by Browning to Rabbi Ben Ezra

"Nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul."

cannot brook the American poet's utterances; and refusing to read on, fails to discover that although Whitman probably never thought of the Holy Spirit as speaking in the heart of man, he yet did regard the soul as the seat of final authority, as the temple whence issued a voice no other than divine. Just as the Inner Light received from the Quaker a trust beyond that accorded to the words of the Scriptures and the utterances of the Church, so did this voice find in Whitman one who yielded

himself in unquestioning obedience to its guidance. Said he in *Song of the Broad-Axe*, —

> " Outside authority enters only after the precedence of inside authority ";

a statement to which in more than one place he gave much fuller utterance and, in *Song of Occupations*, at least, a more poetic expression as, —

> " We consider Bibles and religions divine — I do not say they are not divine,
> I say they have all grown out of you and may grow out of you still,
> It is not they who give the life, it is you who give the life,
> Leaves are not more shed from the trees, or trees from the earth, than they are shed from you."

Such sentences, it is true, do not formulate the doctrine of the Third Person of the Trinity as defined by theologians; but it is not too much to hold that they constitute a recognition of that striving of the Spirit with man which is regarded as the characteristic work of the Holy Ghost.

Of the practical application of the second of those two great commandments upon which, according to the words of Jesus, hang all the Law and the Prophets, Whitman was, among the poets of America, the chief apostle. To some extent, however variable in degree, all the others implied an aristocracy of the intellect; he preached — lived indeed — a democracy absolutely without alloy. With the exception of Poe, who did not mention America in his poetry, they all looked upon their country as a place in which man, untram-

melled as never before, might work out his destiny; and, in so doing, might make himself fit for membership in the brotherhood of which equality is the chief cornerstone. Whitman's gospel was, that all men are already fit. So strongly, indeed, and so insistently did he dwell upon this fitness that he is quite justly said to have identified Americanism and Democracy, not with brotherhood, which by its popularity has come to be hardly more than a word to juggle with, but with comradeship, a term which may be taken to stand for the actual practice of the fundamental principle in the teachings of Christ. Certainly Whitman had the courage of his convictions — to such an extent indeed, that he became a rock of stumbling. It was not that he laid himself open to the charge of egotism by announcing that he "had arrived," or by hailing himself quite unblushingly as the equal of every one of his predecessors; it was not that he made himself champion of a cause much more unpopular in his own day than it is at the present time, by announcing in the opening poem of *Leaves of Grass*, —

> "The Female equally with the Male I sing";

it was not that he was often boldly unorthodox in his religious teachings and even more often fearlessly unconventional in his moral theories. All these things had been endured in America before. Egotism and the equality of the sexes, and many another fanaticism had existed even in high places without causing much serious agitation in society.

But here was a man, not of the New England tradition, not of the Brahmin caste — to use the apt expression of Holmes — who, no respecter of persons and quite deficient in a sense of proportion, undertook in *Who Learns My Lesson Complete* and elsewhere to maintain without suggestion of the possibility of any other point of view that —

"Boss, journeyman, apprentice, churchman and atheist,
The stupid and the wise thinker, parents and offspring,
merchant, clerk, porter and customer,
Editor, author, artist and schoolboy,"

the hired man in the fields, the ox-trainer, the tan-faced prairie boy, the felon on trial in the courts, and the learned professor at his desk are each every whit as good as the other, or, as Whitman liked to say even more disconcertingly, are each every whit as bad as the other. It is small wonder that our modern scribes and Pharisees were somewhat disturbed, and that even the Sadducees were a bit shaken. They might perhaps have contented themselves with outward indifference, had the poet gone no further; but they felt that they must speak their disapproval when they read in the lines *To a Common Prostitute* —

"Be composed — be at ease, —
Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you,
Not till the waters refuse to glisten for you and the leaves
to rustle for you, do my words refuse to glisten and
rustle for you."

Such democracy and comradeship was not to be borne. It perhaps afforded a too vivid recollec-

tion of a certain memorable occasion when a fearless young teacher arose from writing with his finger upon the ground to say to those who had gathered to tempt him, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone."

The democracy taught by Jesus Christ may be found quite literally reproduced in the poems of Whitman, so literally in fact that the American writer seemed, perhaps still seems, to be preaching a new gospel. All along the ages since the man of Galilee promulgated His very simple doctrines, the accepted, but unsolved, problem has been so to warp them that they may conform to the complexities of life, rather than that the latter may be untangled and straightened to coincide with them. Whitman, however, did not undertake to solve the problem by either method; instead he rejected it altogether, and began anew with the fundamental principle in its purity. No less than Saint Paul did he see that the greatest thing in the world is love. Said he in *Calamus*, —

"Having studied the new and antique, the Greek and Germanic systems,
Kant having studied and stated, Fichte and Schelling and Hegel,
Stated the lore of Plato, and Socrates greater than Plato,
And greater than Socrates sought and stated, Christ divine having studied long,
I see reminiscent today those Greek and Germanic systems,
See the philosophies all, Christian Churches and tenets see,
Yet underneath Socrates clearly see, and underneath Christ the divine I see
The dear love of man for his comrade, the attraction of friend to friend."

Many times elsewhere did Whitman return to the same theme. It is found in *The Mystic Trumpeter*, in *Starting from Paumanok*, in *For You, O Democracy*, in *Song of the Broad-Axe*, and in a considerable number of other poems where the emphasis is laid upon the general brotherhood of man, upon the need of each for all and all for each. But Whitman did not stop there. Had he done so his message would have sounded no new note; would have fallen far short of containing the essential teaching of Christ. It is in such poems as *Out of the Rolling Ocean, The Crowd, To You, Song of the Open Road* and *Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances*, that we discover wherein Whitman differs from other poets. In these poems and oftentimes elsewhere, he makes clear his belief that the hope of the perfection of the race — of the salvation of man, if one will — rests upon a general feeling of good-will to all mankind, not upon a mere ready acceptance of the abstract theory that all men are born free and equal, but upon intense personal regard, upon strong active affection which is no other than love indeed. Clearly Whitman taught a hard doctrine, nor was the world any more ready to receive it in the nineteenth century than it was when a greater than Whitman taught it in the first.

Of special interest is it to know that Whitman believed America to be the land in which this true democracy of friends would eventually be established. So firmly, indeed, did he hold to this belief that his patriotism may be regarded as an essential element of his religion. Said he in a foot-

note to *Preface, 1876*, "In my opinion, it is by a fervent, accepted development of comradeship, the beautiful and sane affection of man for man, latent in all young fellows, north and south, east and west — it is by this, I say, and by what goes directly and indirectly along with it, that the United States of the future (I cannot too often repeat), are to be most effectually welded together, interpolated, anneal'd into a living union." Americanism was never less than a passion, a religious passion with Whitman. In the early poem *To Foreign Lands*, he boldly wrote, —

"I heard that you asked for something to prove this puzzle, the New World,
And to define America, her athletic Democracy,
Therefore I send you my poems that you behold in them what you want."

These words constitute an acceptance of a mission. Other lessons, no doubt, he had to teach; yet to define America to the old world and to herself also, was no unimportant part of his work. Always insisting, as in *Calamus*, that he was called "to celebrate the need of comrades" and, as in many another poem, that he must "sing the song of companionship," he frequently enlarged the thought until it took the form which with him found its most direct expression perhaps in *To the East and to the West* as,

"I believe the main purport of these states is to found a superb friendship, exalté, previously unknown,
Because I perceive it waits and has been always waiting latent in all men."

This faith made America holy ground to Whitman. He mentioned every state in the Union, and the name of each fell from his lips like a caress; he began an invocation to his country with the love-filled phrase "Thou mother with thy equal Brood"; he professed in the time of peace "to hear America singing her varied carols;" and he maintained no less, in those years when the land was rent by civil strife, that "over the carnage rose prophetic a voice foretelling the invincibility of the republic of those who love each other." Asia and Europe had been given their opportunity, he said, only to prove unworthy of their trust; would America likewise fail? He could not feel that it would.

Science, which may be said to have advanced to full manhood in the nineteenth century, and Democracy, which may be regarded as having at least arrived at its majority in the United States, both working together were, to Whitman's mind, preparing the way for a religion indescribably grander than the old theology of the East, — "Time's younger, but perfect offspring — heir of the West — lusty and loving and wondrous beautiful." "There can be," he went on to say in the preface to *As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free*," no sane and complete personality, nor any grand and electric nationality, without the stock element of religion imbuing all other elements. . . . The time has certainly come to begin to discharge the idea of religion in the United States, from mere ecclesiasticism, and from Sundays, and churches, and church-going, and assign it to that

general position, chiefest, most indispensable, most exhilarating, to which the others are to be adjusted, inside of all human character, and education and affairs. The people, especially the young men and women of America must begin to learn that religion (like poetry), is something far, far different from what they had supposed. It is, indeed, too important to the power and perpetuity of the New World to be consign'd any longer to the churches, old or new, Catholic or Protestant — Saint this or Saint that. It must be consign'd henceforth to democracy *en masse*, and to literature. It must enter into the poems of the nation. It must make the nation."

This perfection of religion, this culmination of life whether personal or national could not, to Whitman's mind, be attained either by following the rules of conventional morality or by returning to older ideals, however much better those older ideals might seem to be. Here again the poetry of Whitman became a stumbling-block. It taught a new conduct of life, a new theory of values, a new relationship between good and evil. Early critics of Whitman contented themselves with saying that he was immoral. Their successors felt that this word would not do, and substituted the term unmoral. Plainly, however, they too were at fault, for Whitman himself left it on record that he "felt temporary depression more than once, for fear in 'Leaves of Grass' the *moral* parts were not sufficiently pronounced." Such concern as this — and he gave voice to it now and again — shows that

Whitman was not without moral sense, though indeed his morality might be a new morality. He believed, as Mr. Burroughs has well pointed out, that "the time had come for an utterance out of radical, uncompromising human nature; let conventions and refinements stand back, let nature, let the soul, let the elemental forces speak; let the body, the passions, sex, be exalted; the stone rejected by the builders shall be the chief stone of the corner." Illuminating as this summary is, it is itself no more than an expansion of what Whitman said for himself when he wrote in *Song of Myself*,

> "I permit to speak at every hazard
> Nature without check, with original energy."

Such frankness as this could but meet with disapproval. One might brook, because of its vagueness, another line in the same poem,

> "Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul;"

yet one could hardly allow to pass without emphatic protest such later lines as, —

> "Through me forbidden voices,
> Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the veil,
> Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigur'd."

Plainly, said his opponents, the man is mad, or if not mad, certainly lacking in all sense of balance. Small wonder was it to them, then, that he so far

forgot himself as to identify good and evil, and to say in *Starting from Paumanok*,

> "Omnes! omnes! let others ignore what they may,
> I make the poem of evil also, I commemorate that part also,
> I am myself just as much evil as good, and my nation is —
> and I say there is in fact no evil,
> (Or if there is I say it is just as important to you, to the land or to me as any thing else is)."

Clearly it was possible without intentional injustice to bring damaging evidence against Whitman. He was so eager to give emphatic expression to his new doctrine that he often failed to make sufficiently prominent the fundamental principle supporting it. As a matter of fact he did say in *To Think of Time*,

> "The difference between sin and goodness is no delusion;"

and to that truth he held tenaciously. It is unfortunate that he did not carry out the promise made in an early poem,

> "I will show that whatever happens to anybody, it may be turned to beautiful results."

Perhaps he could not, for the reason that he often lost sight of a certain essential. Quite unconsciously to himself he was trying in the line just quoted, to give voice to an idea which is as old as Christianity — older in fact, although it did not take on its perfect form until it was uttered by Saint Paul. The Apostle to the Gentiles saw the truth in its entirety, Whitman only in part. The American poet's thought was that all things work

together for good; Saint Paul's that they so work together to them that love God. Whether or not it is allowed that this point is well taken, it will be admitted by any attentive reader of Whitman that he did not so much deny the existence of evil, as he insisted that evil is but a passing phase of goodness. "All that is evil," he exclaimed in *Roaming in Thought*, "I saw hastening to merge itself and become lost and dead." So believing, he felt constrained to insist that since there is no such thing as permanent evil, there is no such thing as evil at all. If it be pointed out that this teaching is very old — far older than Whitman, far older than America indeed, it will be admitted perhaps that in *Birds of Passage* he gave it an expression which clothed the dry bones of an old philosophy and made them once more a living thing.

"In this broad earth of ours,
Amid the measureless grossness and the slag,
Enclosed and safe within its central heart,
Nestles the seed perfection.

"By every life a share or more or less,
None born but it is born, conceal'd or unconceal'd, the seed is waiting.

"In spiral routes by long detours,
(As a much tacking ship upon the sea),
For it the partial to the permanent flowing,
For it the real to the ideal tends,
For it the mystic evolution,
Not the right only justified, what we call evil also justified.

" Forth from their masks no matter what,
From the huge festering truth, from craft and guile and tears
Health to emerge and joy, joy universal.

" Out of the bulk, the morbid and the shallow,
Out of the bad majority, the varied countless frauds of men and states,
Electric, antiseptic yet, cleaving, suffusing all,
Only the good is universal."

The final solution of the problem of the relationship between good and evil will, almost beyond a doubt, yield a satisfying answer to every question arising in connection with the conduct of life. Whitman, however, never laid claim to having reached such a solution, nor did he undertake to answer more than a very few of the many questions which harassed him as they harass every man. " It is therefore impossible," as Mr. Guthrie remarks, " to extract a little treatise on morals, and quite as difficult to obtain a systematic solution of the problem of evil from Whitman's poems." As a matter of fact more than once Whitman insisted that he presented nature — human nature — as it is, and implied that each man must draw his own conclusions, set his own value upon this and that, make his own choice between what seemed to him good and evil, and in the end abide by the results of that choice. Still the attitude of Whitman towards the intrinsic value of the objects of choice was by no means one of indifference. He might say in *Myself and Mine*,

> " I give nothing as duties
> What others give as duties, I give as living impulses; "

yet any reader other than the most cursory must see that Whitman was constantly inculcating the lesson that every true man fights the battle of life nobly and courageously. Like Lowell's ideal American described in the *Commemoration Ode* as one —

> " Who stands self-poised on manhood's solid earth
> Not forced to frame excuses for his birth,
> Fed from within with all the strength he needs,"

so Whitman's stalwart man was he who, sure of himself, sure of his mission, could trust the promptings of his own soul. " Such a heroic person," the poet said in his first preface to *Leaves of Grass* " walks at his ease through and out of that custom or precedent in authority that suits him not." . . . he is " as superb as a nation since he has the qualities which make a superb nation." To such a man the present, as Whitman points out in *Song of Myself*, is always the accepted time,

> " This minute that comes over the past decillions
> Then is no better than it and now."

And upon that time he seizes. Nothing will satisfy his soul " except to walk free and own no superior." He sees that " there is no trade or employment; but the young man following it may become a hero "; whatever his occupation may be, if he but takes his stand upon the dictum recorded in *Song of the Broad-Axe*,

"Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes . . .
How beggarly appear arguments before a defiant deed!
How the floridness of the materials of cities shrivels before a man's or woman's look!"

From that vantage ground he fights the good fight. It little matters according to Whitman what the outcome may be; what greatly matters is the courage with which the conflict is borne. "Have you heard," he asks in *Song of Myself,*

"Have you heard that it was good to gain the day?
I also say it is good to fall: battles are lost in the same spirit in which they are won."

. . . . . .

"Vivas to those who have fail'd!
And to those whose war-vessels sank in the sea!
And to those themselves who sank in the sea!
And to all generals that lost engagements, and all overcoming heroes!
And the numberless unknown heroes equal to the greatest heroes known."

The heroic conduct of life was a constant theme with Whitman; yet, great as was the emphasis which he placed upon it, he subordinated it to another larger theme — that of immortality. He could not do otherwise. Life in the flesh, whatever its certainty, was to his mind no more than an incident in an existence which has neither beginning nor ending since it always has been and always will be. It has been pointed out by more than one critic that the lines in *Song of Myself,*

"Has any one supposed it lucky to be born?
I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die,"

do not necessarily imply anything more than the certainty of our present life. Yet one has but to read on in the same poem to discover that Whitman, like Browning, modernizing a world-old belief, held quite clearly that —

"Ages past the soul existed,
Here an age 'tis resting merely,
And hence fleets again for ages."

To not a few readers Whitman's presentation is less attractive, less poetic in expression than that found in the writings of Browning, or of Wordsworth, or of many another poet who has had the courage to look before as well as after. Still one must admit that the virility in Whitman's words carries a conviction which the greater beauty of theirs cannot. "It is time to explain myself" he said, in *Song of Myself*, "let us stand up";

"The clock indicates the moment — what does eternity indicate?"

. . . . . .

"Afar down I see the huge first Nothing, I know I was even there,
I waited unseen and always, and slept the lethargic mist.
And took my time, and took no hurt from the feted carbon.

"Immense have been the preparations for me,
Faithful and friendly the arms that have helped me,
Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like faithful boatmen,
For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings
They sent influences to look after what was to hold me.

"All forces have been steadily employed to complete and
delight me,
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul."

No fair critic can deny that this passage to say the least is evolution poetized — science brought to perfect expression. One may prefer to recall the beautiful passage in Wordsworth's famous *Ode* " trailing clouds of glory do we come from God who is our home "; yet as one reads the words of Whitman, one feels quite as certain for oneself as the American poet felt for himself, that there never was a time when past generations did not guide him, that there never was a time when he was not.

The future, too, was quite as sure to Whitman as the past, " O welcome, ineffable grace of dying days," he exclaimed in *Song of Myself*,

" There is no stoppage and never can be stoppage,
If I, you, and the worlds, and all beneath or upon their
surfaces were this moment reduced back to a pallid
float, it would not avail in the long run.
We should surely bring up again where we now stand,
And surely go as much farther, and then farther and farther."

The vision of Whitman, then, is the vision of eternity; and through its limitless expanse the poet sees the soul of man ever moving onward. Delayed the soul may be at any time, even as it is often delayed during its sojourn in the flesh; yet no let, no hindrance can permanently check its progress or its growth. Even as the starry systems " multiplied as high as one can cipher, edges but the rim of farther systems," so is it, says Whitman in the poem but just quoted, with the soul, —

"Wider and wider it spreads expanding, always expanding,
Outward and outward and forever outward."

The thought of the unending continuance of the soul was ever dominant with Whitman. It was sounded in such early work as *Starting from Paumanok*, *Song of Myself*, and *Song of the Universal;* it was reiterated in many of the poems which were gathered under the general title of *Whispers of Heavenly Death;* and it served as the keynote to which the contents of all the later volumes, *Songs of Parting*, *Sands at Seventy*, and *Good-bye, My Fancy*, were attuned. At times indeed it transcended those other themes which almost always stood first with Whitman, — the themes of Americanism, Democracy, and Comradeship. Important as he held these to be, he yet could write in the *Preface of 1876:* "I am not sure but the last inclosing sublimation of race or poem is, what it thinks of death. After the rest has been comprehended and said, even the grandest — after those contributions to mightiest nationality, or to sweetest song, or to the best personalism, have been fully accepted and sung, and the pervading fact of visible existence is sounded and apparently completed, it still remains to be really completed by suffusing through the whole, that other pervading invisible fact combining the rest and furnishing for person or state the only permanent and unitary meaning. . . . In my opinion, it is no less than this idea of immortality, above all other ideas, that is to enter into, and vivify, and give

crowning religious stamp to democracy." . . . It is true that Whitman shuddered a moment before the mocking voice which cried in *Yet, Yet Ye Downcast Hours*. "Matter is conqueror — matter, triumphant only, continues onward," and that he paused to ask in *Thought*, "Are souls drown'd and destroy'd? Is only matter triumphant?" This mood, however, had no long endurance. It retired before the thought that as the day cannot exhibit all things to man, so neither can life; that as the night is a true and loving teacher, so also is death. Whitman could not bring himself to admit that the soul will ever suffer annihilation; he was quite sure that "the future is no more uncertain than the present." He therefore, like Browning, could "greet the unseen with a cheer." The future held for him unending possibilities, unending promises. Eagerly, in *Passage to India*, did he entrust himself to the seas of eternity, enheartening his soul with those stirring words, —

"Sail forth — steer for the deep waters only
Reckless, O soul, exploring, I with thee and thou with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.
O my brave soul!
O farther, farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe! Are they not all the seas of God?
O farther, farther, farther sail!"

But, some one may say, our remembrance of experience in past ages, if we admit that we had existence then, is but vague — too vague to yield

us certainty, too vague to add to present joy or pain; how then can we find peace or satisfaction in contemplating a future, allowing its possibility, which may be as wanting in memory of the present as the present is of the past? The question is by no means idle. Happily Whitman, though probably quite unconsciously, provided an answer. "I am the chanter of Personality" he wrote in *To a Historian;* "nothing endures but personal qualities," he added in *Song of the Broad-Axe;* "I know I am deathless," he insisted in *Song of Myself,* —

> "I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter's compass;
> I know I shall not pass like a child's carlacue cut with a burnt stick at night."

Such knowledge, such certainty is manifestly possible only when personality and individuality mean one and the same thing. Whitman indeed used the term interchangeably. In *Democratic Vistas* one may read, "We come now to what is of the only real importance, Personalities," and in *By Blue Ontario's Shore* one lights upon the expression, the meaning of which is no different, "Underneath all, individuals." This personality, this individuality, this identity, to use another term of Whitman's, was in his thought a special gift of our present existence, a gift which, though held in reserve during eons of past time, is now ours forever. We cannot lose it, it cannot be taken from us. "You are not thrown away," Whitman maintained, in *To Think of Time,*

"You gather closely and safely around yourself,
Yourself! yourself! yourself forever and ever!
It is not to diffuse you that you were born of your father and mother, it is to identify you,
Something long preparing and formless is arriv'd and form'd in you,
You are henceforth secure, whatever comes or goes."

This persistence of individuality is one of Whitman's main teachings. Now and again as he preached it, he seemed to speak as by inspiration. Often when we read, we are almost led to exclaim, "Surely this man was a prophet!" Conviction seizes upon us; and carried away by the poet's words, we, no less than he, "smiling content at death" look out upon the future, confident that endowed with our present personality, we shall move onward to no uncertain goal. The haunting words of Tennyson, "I hope to see my Pilot face to face" may still possess their charm, the triumphant faith of Browning which found its perfect expression in the concluding lines of *Prospice* may lose no whit of its power; yet neither Tennyson with all his beauty, nor Browning with all his strength, gives the feeling of security, the sense of assurance which is ours, when we hear the voice of Whitman chanting of the Eternal Voyage, —

"Passage to more than India!
Passage, immediate passage! the blood burns in my veins!
Away O soul! hoist instantly the anchor
Cut the hawsers — haul out — shake out every sail!
. . . . . .
Greater than stars or suns,
Bounding, O soul, thou journeyest forth.

What cheerful willingness for others' sake to give up all!
For others' sake to suffer all!
Reckoning ahead, O soul, when thou, the time achiev'd,
The seas all crossed, weather'd the capes, the voyage done,
Surrounded, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attain'd
As filled with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother
found,
The Younger melts in fondness in his arms."

X

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER

The poets of America can hardly be said to have made contributions of value to formal theological thought. Neither intentionally nor unintentionally did they offer demonstrable solutions to any of the important problems which confront the theologian, much less did they, either as a group or as individuals, furnish material from which a system of theology, even the simplest, can be formulated. In other words, they were poets, — and poets alone. As such they remained unwaveringly true to their call, hearing indeed no other. In a very true sense, therefore, they were not disobedient to that heavenly vision which it was their privilege to enjoy. Nevertheless, as poets they were conspicuously religious. Their writings abound in records of their religious experiences; the inspiration of numbers of their poems was undoubtedly Christian; and their mission to no small degree was and still continues to be a fulfilling, though more often than not, an unconscious fulfilling of the injunction of Isaiah to strengthen the weak hands, to confirm the feeble knees.

This marked religious element in American poetry may be what has preserved it alive. Certainly in the possession of no other characteristic

can the poets of this country vie on equal terms with their contemporaries in England. The narratives of Longfellow show but thin and pale beside the *Idylls of the King*. Whittier, much as he had in common with Burns and Wordsworth, was inferior to the former as a poet of common life and was outstripped by the latter as a poet of nature. Whitman with all his originality, ruggedness, and strength, fell short of Browning in breadth and power. Furthermore, similar conclusions must nearly always be drawn when Bryant, Poe, Emerson, Holmes, and Lowell are set on one hand against Keats, Shelley, Byron, Arnold, and Swinburne on the other. If, however, we limit ourselves to the religious point of view, we discover a change in relative proportions. In the expression of firm faith and confident hope the hymns of Bryant, Whittier, and Holmes are always the equal and not infrequently the superior of those written by English poets. Again, the many questions which the thought of death awakens, are quite as resolutely met and quite as courageously answered by Longfellow and Lowell as by Browning; and the certainty of immortality is much more convincingly asserted in Emerson and Whitman than in that great poem which to many a reader is an anchor of hope, the *In Memoriam* of Tennyson. Still further, there stands out persistently in American poetry such a rarely and certainly never deeply shaken belief in the goodness of God, always regarded as the very Father of His children, that before it the scepticism of Arnold, the doubt of

Clough, the indifference of Rossetti, the infidelity and violence of Swinbourne become altogether lighter than vanity, mere chaff which the wind driveth away. American poetry, it need not be denied, has often qualities which will go far towards making it live for a long period of time, perhaps forever; yet it cannot be unsafe to maintain that as by its religious content it has in the past made itself loved in quarters where no other poetry was being read, so will it in the future continue to win its way to the heart of many a man for whom poets as a rule have no intelligible message.

The greater poets of America chose that good part which shall not be taken away. They spoke, and though dead, yet speak, not to the intellect primarily, but, as befits the poet, to the feelings. Neither the theologian with his ingenious subtleties, nor the philosopher with his complacent agnosticism, nor the scientist with his confident certainties can give us the restful sense of security which our poets, when they speak religiously, are able to impart. They do not urge us to belief in God by bringing forward those various arguments which are differentiated in theology as cosmological, teleological, ontological, moral, and historical. Of these things they will have nothing. Instead, they assume without question that it is quite as sufficient for us, as it is for them, to fall back upon personal expression and say with Saint Paul, " I know in whom I have believed." Again, although our poets might easily have been led to admit the validity of what Professor Huxley, the

scientist, spoke of as " worship for the most part of the silent sort at the altar of the Unknown," they could not have been brought to agree with him, — as but few of us can be, — when he went on to say that the same science which made such worship alone legitimate, " had also found the ideas which can still spiritual cravings." Professor Huxley was ably refuted by his own countryman Matthew Arnold; yet it may well be pointed out that the argument of the distinguished critic was itself anticipated by an American poet nearly a decade before it was uttered. Said Whitman in his preface to the sixth edition of *Leaves of Grass:* " Accepting modern science, and loyally following it without the slightest hesitation, there remains ever recognized still a higher flight, a higher fact, the eternal soul of man, the spiritual, the religious— which it is to be the greatest office of scientism and of future poetry also to launch forth in renew'd faith and scope a hundredfold. To me, the worlds of religiousness, of the conception of the divine, and of the ideal, are just as absolute in humanity and the universe as the world of chemistry, or anything in the objective worlds. To me " — and here Whitman quoted from one of his own poems —

> " To me the prophet and the bard,
> Shall yet maintain themselves, in higher stages yet,
> Shall mediate to the Modern, to Democracy, — interpret yet to them
> God and eidólons."

Plainly Whitman was far less antagonistic to the theories of Huxley than was Arnold, yet on the other hand, his sturdy championship of poetry as having a true mission, — a true religious mission — makes the latter's espousal of the cause, sincere as it certainly was, appear almost weak-hearted. When the true balance is struck, Arnold's substitution of culture for religion is not more satisfying to the soul of man than is Huxley's insistence that the religion of the future must be wholly determined by the methods of natural science. No inconsiderable number of mankind will admit, and of that number the majority, it is safe to say, will insist that there are times when, as Emerson preached unceasingly, " the mind receives a divine wisdom from a source at once the essence of genius, the essence of virtue, and the essence of life, a source which we call Spontaneity or Instinct, or Intuition, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go." Huxley would have denied the validity of wisdom so derived — did in fact deny that there was a source from which such wisdom could issue, maintaining that religion " like all other kinds of knowledge, arises out of the action and interaction of man's mind with that which is not man's mind;" he made no allowance for things of the spirit, he beheld in a very literal sense the wind, the earthquake, and the fire; but he heard not the voice of God which speaks to the listening heart of man. And Arnold likewise had ears to hear; but though hearing, did not understand. The highest for him was " to know the best which

has been thought and said in the world." His objection to Huxley's teaching was not that it overlooked or denied the instinct of man for real religion, but that it did not allow for the " fortifying and elevating and quickening and suggestive power of art and poetry and eloquence to relate the results of modern science to our need for conduct, our need for beauty." Between the highly educated army captained by Huxley and the well-cultured host led by Arnold, religion would have been, would be, in narrow straits, had it not been, were it not, for poetry — poetry, which, especially when it speaks religiously, calmly, assumes, with Emerson " an inspiration which giveth man wisdom, an inspiration which cannot be denied without impiety, an intelligence which makes us organs of its activity and receivers of its truth, a soul for the explanation of which all metaphysics, all philosophy is at fault, a soul the presence or absence of which is all we can affirm."

The Church in our day and generation, it can hardly be denied, has fallen upon evil ways. There lack not voices which boldly declare that she has reached the beginning of her end, that the day of her destruction is at hand. Within the camp itself many of her leaders are apologetic, some are shamefaced. And even the remnant, that small band which still believes in the life of the spirit, the few faithful, the little leaven that is yet to leaven the whole lump, can hardly in the present time take heart, can hardly yet pluck up courage. Many of those who minister in high places, far from preach-

ing religion pure and undefiled, listen, as did their predecessors in the time of Isaiah, to a rebellious people that will not hear the law of the Lord, to wayward children which say to their seers, "See not"; and to their prophets, "Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits." Forgetful — often willfully forgetful — that their chief commission is to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified, they strive to hold their people by giving popular lectures on science for which they are incompetent, on socialism by which they hope to catch the never stable masses, on higher criticism that they may gain a reputation for scholarship, on politics that they may be thought practical. Meanwhile, quite as much as in Milton's day,

> "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed."

They are as a flock without a shepherd. Blind, they are led by the blind, and both are in danger of the ditch. Here ritualism has taken the place of righteousness, genuflexion of prayer, candles and chasubles of humbleness of heart; there the measuring of mint and anise and cummin has superseded the weightier matter of justice and mercy and faith; elsewhere phylacteries are made broad, the borders of garments are enlarged, and their wearers using vain repetitions, think they shall be heard for their much speaking. Turn where one will, false Christs and false prophets, as was foretold long ago, be-set us; signs and won-

ders have not failed; wars and rumors of war are on every hand; and some even of the very elect are deceived.

There is but one path to righteousness, the path of the spirit. Strait is that gate and narrow is that way, and few there be that find it. Only those who become as little children enter into the kingdom of heaven. Neither science nor culture can meet the needs of their souls, can still the cries of their hearts. For them Earth may fill her lap with pleasures of her own, but as Wordsworth ably maintained in his famous *Ode*, she never quite succeeds in winning them to herself, though, —

> "Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
> And even with something of a mother's mind, and no unworthy aim,
> The homely Nurse doth all she can
> To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,
> Forget the glories he hath known,
> And that imperial palace whence he came."

The trumpets of science attract for a time, the softer music of culture gives ease; but lasting repose is attained only when the voice of the spirit whispers peace. Yet often do those who are of the spirit listen in vain for the sound of that voice. The Church was once the oracle through which it chiefly spoke; nor, though far too often the words of the priest of today are a confused if not an inarticulate babbling, dare one say that the sacred channel is wholly choked, that the shrines no longer re-echo to the holy message. The Church has not

so much lost, as have her ministers deliberately given up an ancient privilege; yet in so doing they have approached perilously near the point where there is danger that the spirit may wholly leave both them and her. That such a catastrophe is inevitable, the little band of the still faithful cannot admit: rather are they confident that they shall yet be vindicated, mindful that though sorrow may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning.

Meanwhile help arises elsewhere. Even as Saint Paul, when he addressed the citizens of Athens, did not hesitate to make use of Greek poetry in support of his message, so surely are we at liberty to strengthen our entrenchments by calling to our aid what our own poets also have said. Nor is it too much to feel that our defence, though similar, is stronger than his. He, speaking to men whom he found ignorantly worshipping at an altar bearing the inscription TO THE UNKNOWN GOD, laid hold upon the words of a pagan writer who, quite as ignorantly as they, had stumbled upon the truth; we, maintaining our position before those who understand our language though they may dissent, or who at least see our position though they may themselves hold another, seize by right of the apostle's example upon such utterances of our own poets as are, not only plainly religious, but for the most part frankly Christian. For centuries poets without number have recognized how important to the life of man is religion in general and Christianity in particular. Of these some have been antagonistic, others have taken the defensive, few have been

indifferent. Yet it is not by those who are aggressively for, or by those who are aggressively against religion, much less by those who are cold or lukewarm, that the soul is led into paths of peace. One indeed is not led thither at all; rather he quite unexpectedly finds himself there, surrounded by the voices of many witnesses, witnesses which he knows to be true; for his own soul bears no other testimony than that which they also speak. And of the divers voices rising on every side, those of the poets, in whom thought and language make one music, sound the fundamental tone. In their words, the perfect vision finds perfect expression, the spirit speaks once more to man.

God, the poets of this country no less than many in other lands, know by immediate vision, as a personal presence abiding in His world forever. They see in Him the loving Father without whom not a single sparrow falleth, much less one of His children who, we have been told, are of more value than many sparrows. True, not to all our poets was the same vision given. It may perhaps be truly said that no one of them but has failed to satisfy some reader. The outlook of Poe is too narrow for one, that of Whitman too general for another, that of Emerson too subtle for a third. Again, the slowness with which Bryant came to maturity in his thought of God, the frequently questioning attitude which Lowell assumed in his, and the strongly antagonistic stand which Holmes took towards certain long-ascribed attributes in his, have been known to disturb the tranquillity

of some over-sensitive souls, while the readiness with which Longfellow and Whittier accepted traditional views has at least been spoken of in some circles as wholly uncritical. A truce to such quibbles and quiddities! By them is the essential and illuminating thought forgotten, lost indeed in a labyrinth of thinking; by them God becomes a mere word, our thought of Him a mere syllogism. As the poets themselves saw Him, so may we, if we will but follow in their steps. Us also the beatific vision awaits. Guided by them we too may enter into His presence, we too may taste and see and know that the Lord is good. It matters little that Poe was near-sighted, that Emerson's penetration was profound, that the others differed likewise among themselves. That upon which they all looked is the same. In no subtle sense their vision, whatever their point of view, was one.

The American poets, however, had no new definition of God to present, nor, as a matter of fact, did any of them ascribe to Him a single attribute not long and widely regarded by others as His. Indeed, it is unsafe to assert that it lies within the power of man, whatever his inspiration or vision, to make such a definition or to discover such attributes. The advancement of science, it is true, has greatly enlarged our understanding of the methods of God at work in His world, but modern comprehension of Him, whatever gain has been made in details, is not and in all likelihood cannot be essentially different from that possessed of old by those to whom He revealed Himself,

whether Jews or Gentiles, whether Greeks or Barbarians. It is therefore not the emphasis laid by Bryant upon His power, by Whittier upon His mercy, by Longfellow upon His loving-kindness, which makes those writers helpful in their religious thought, neither is it the recognition given by Lowell and Holmes to His infinite goodness and by Emerson and Whitman to His far-reaching dominion and might. These attributes, one must freely admit, have been dwelt upon many, many times in far more eloquent words than ever fell from any American poet's lips. Nevertheless, every one of those poets, from wavering Poe to self-confident Whitman, possessed to some degree that lively faith in God which the Christian regards as knowledge indeed. It is little likely that citations from the American poets, however numerous they might be, would convert the atheist — nothing less than a miracle can do that; — but such citations are able to recall the wanderer to his allegiance, to give to the doubter belief; to the weak-hearted, strength; to the faithful, confidence, courage, and hope. Not once but often, as we read the words of the American poets, not rarely but many times, are we made doubly conscious that our lives are passed in the very presence of God; spiritually we see Him face to face, spiritually hear His tender voice, spiritually discern that underneath us are His everlasting arms. Mystic communion with Him is, in those perfect moments, our soul-satisfying lot. Forgetful for the time of all His wondrous might, majesty, glory, dominion, and power, we

become once more as little children, and, as Whittier in *At School-Close* advised,

> " Hold fast the truth that God is good."

In their attitude toward Christ the poets of America were less sure of themselves, less at one with each other than in their conception of God. Their poetry, as we read it for their thought of Christ, no longer reflects even with varying distinctness a single vision; rather is it plain that the vision which they saw of Him was itself divided. Many theories have been advanced to explain the founder of Christianity. Of these, one is that there never was such a being at all, that Jesus was a myth deliberately manufactured by well-intentioned men and ignorantly accepted by their simple disciples. This theory, popular at one time, is no longer held to any wide extent, perhaps not at all; certainly no trace of it is found in American poetry. Another of these explanations is that Jesus was a great teacher of truth, — perhaps the greatest that the world has ever known, — abundantly worthy therefore to be placed beside Confucius, Buddha, Zoroaster, Plato. This, beyond a doubt, was the attitude of Emerson and Whitman. Still another type of thought is that Jesus, whether His birth is regarded as miraculous or natural, was so endowed with divine attributes that He was in a true sense a new revelation of God to man; transcending, though human, every other human being; shining, indeed, as the Light of the

World, being indeed, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Here, however widely they differed among themselves, stood Bryant, Lowell, Longfellow, and Holmes. A fourth theory is that which the Church has always held to be its fundamental doctrine. By it Christ is asserted to be one with the Father, to have coexisted with Him from the beginning, to have emptied Himself by His own free will of His infinite glory and to have become man that He might sacrifice Himself for us and our salvation before He returned again to the bosom of God from whom He came forth. This was the teaching of Saint Paul and Saint John; this has been the belief of a countless number of men and women extending down through the ages. Not one of our American poets, however, was able to accept the doctrine in its entirety. Longfellow and Whittier and perhaps Bryant stood near enough to be illuminated by its glow; they were, not the less, afar off.

And indeed the doctrine is hard. It demands an exercise of faith of which but few persons are capable. Still, once accepted, it removes every difficulty in the way of the triumph of Christianity. If God was morally bound, as Saint Anselm would have us believe, to become incarnate, then do the miraculous birth of Jesus, the wondrous works which He performed, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into Heaven, and His subsequent appearance to Saint Stephen and Saint Paul, cease to be stumbling-blocks to the intellect — rather are they a rock of defence to the heart of man. Christ is then seen as very God and very

man. Accepted as the Author and Finisher of our faith, He solves for us, as Browning pointed out in *The Death in the Desert*, the enigma of this world and gives to every problem of life its final answer. The difficulty of the doctrine is its essential simplicity. It is plainly a cutting rather than an untying of the Gordian knot and seems, no doubt, to many a mind no legitimate method of silencing certain grave questions which daily obtrude themselves upon the soul. The American poets therefore cannot be regarded as having deliberately or perhaps even consciously rejected the true doctrine of the divinity of Christ. Rather do their poems reflect the attitude of many men who shrink with a certain noble fear from too readily admitting that faith and the sensibilities are equally trustworthy with knowledge and the intellect. Be that as it may, the poets of America were never antagonistic in any iconoclastic sense to the fundamental belief of Christianity. If they could not accept it in its entirety, they could not do other than treat it with respect and admit atleast the possibility of its truth. Perhaps, all things considered, their general belief with regard to the founder of Christianity has been best summed up, not by any one of them, but by one of our minor singers, Mr. Richard Watson Gilder:

> " If Jesus Christ be man,
> (And only man), I say
> That of all mankind I will cleave to him,
> And to him I will cleave alway.

> " If Jesus Christ be God,
> (And the only God), I swear
> I will follow him through heaven and hell,
> The earth, the sea, and the air."

The doctrine of the personality of the Holy Spirit presents difficulties even greater than those involved in that of the divinity of Christ. Men have ever been prone to think of God as existing in some sense in the form of a human being. It matters little whether their conception of Him has been frankly anthropomorphic as it was with the Greeks, the Romans, and the Hebrews; or pantheistic as it has been and still is with the Hindoos; or transcendental as Christianity joining hands with certain philosophers has for centuries attempted to teach, the fact remains that when men pray, they bow before a Being who, however infinite they may think Him to be in glory, dominion, and love, is still One in whose image they are made. Again, when men speak of Christ, they are almost certain to picture Him, whatever their belief, not as the Word which was in the beginning with God, not as the Son eternally existent with the Father, but as Jesus, the son of Mary moving, as Shakespeare wrote three centuries since,

> " amidst those holy fields
> Over whose acres walked those blessed feet
> Which fourteen hundred years ago were nailed
> For our advantage on the bitter cross."

But when men turn their attention to the Holy Spirit, they are perforce less concrete in their

thought. They have no authority for thinking of Him as walking in the garden in the cool of the day, or as weeping over the hardened inhabitants of Jerusalem. They know not in what form the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters or overshadowed the Virgin of Galilee. True, the Scriptures bear witness that the Holy Spirit once descended in a bodily shape like a dove, and again was heard as a rushing mighty wind and appeared as cloven tongues like as of fire, yet the record of these manifestations does not produce a strong conviction of reality. Mind and soul continue to grope after something more real, something sufficiently tangible, something sufficiently human, if the word will be allowed, to produce a sense of true personality. This doctrine therefore is also hard, so hard in fact that the poets of nearly every age and nationality have left it with the theologians. Nor are the American poets an exception. The doctrine of the personality of the Holy Spirit is scarcely so much as mentioned by them. Nor, it is perhaps well to assert here, did they undertake in any way to explain the Trinity — that mystic unity of Three in One and One in Three. It is barely spoken of by Longfellow, it is just touched upon, and no more, by Whittier. Clearly our American poets refrained from rushing in where angels themselves might well fear to tread.

Yet if the poets of America assist but little to an understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity and even less to a sense of the personality of the Holy Spirit, three of them at least, lead us well on the

way to a knowledge of the work which that Spirit performs in the hearts of men. The Inner-Light of Whittier, the Over-soul of Emerson, and a certain spiritual activity which Whitman recognized, but to which he gave no special name, are all manifestations of what the theologian regards as the power of the Holy Ghost. Each of these men professed to hear a voice, and, plainly, each believed that every man, if he would but listen, could likewise hear the same voice urging the soul to eschew evil and to lay hold upon righteousness. Nor was this voice to them but the voice of conscience. It spoke with far greater authority, it presented ideals, the very perception of which carried conviction of their authenticity, it uttered judgments the finality of which, the poets felt, was not open to question. It was, though Whitman knew it not, and Emerson scarcely believed, and Whittier hardly dared hope, the Comforter, the Strengthener whom, according to Saint John, our Lord promised He would pray the Father to send that we might be guided into all truth. Of the greatness of their own message, it is safe to say, our three poets had no understanding; nor of its import have their readers yet perceived the full value. If their teaching is indeed true, we are ever in the very presence of the holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity. In the hour of need we may lift our prayers to God the Father, sure of His gracious answer to our every petition; in the hour of trial we may lay hold upon God the Son who during the days of His flesh was in all points tempted

like as we are, yet without sin; and in the hour of indecision we may listen to the voice of God, the Holy Ghost, issuing from the oracles within, for our bodies are indeed the temples where He finds a dwelling place with man.

Without undertaking to solve the unanswerable question sometimes asked why God, a perfect and self-sufficient being, should have been moved to create imperfect and unsatisfying man, the greater poets of America were without exception agreed that man's destiny, whatever the desire of God, whatever the power of the atonement, whatever the work of the Holy Ghost, lies wholly within his own hands. Quite unconcerned with the inquiries into what extent we are hampered or left free in formulating articles of belief, or in making choice of lines of action, they either clearly implied or openly taught with Tennyson that our wills are our own. How they are so, our poets did not undertake to define any more than did the English poet; but that they are so to make them God's, American poetry of the nineteenth century most distinctly inculcates. The convictions of Poe were, of course, quite as vaguely expressed upon this matter as upon every other which it concerned him to treat; but there is no uncertainty in the tone with which Whittier urged the thought upon man that now is the accepted time, now the moment when he must make his eternal choice of good or evil. That man sometimes does make the better choice, Whittier firmly believed; yet one cannot turn the pages of the Quaker poet without being led back by memory

to that mighty passage in DeQuincey's *Vision of Sudden Death* in which the English author pressed the warning lesson home " that for every one of us, through every generation, is repeated the original temptation of Eden; that every one of us . . . has a bait offered to the infirm places of his own individual will, that once again a snare is presented for tempting him into a captivity to a luxury of ruin " and that " every child of our mysterious race " runs the risk of completing for himself " the treason of the aboriginal fall."

If the contemporaries of Whittier were not so sharply impressed as he with the conviction that we are hourly weighed in the balance, they were not the less possessed of a vivid sense of the necessity of responding to the call of duty, of choosing the good in preference to the evil. They did not stop to quibble over terms, they did not lull themselves into indifference by giving to Hamlet's railing words " there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so " a significance or weight which neither the author nor the speaker intended. On the contrary, they clearly saw that though good and evil are often interpreted at their common boundary line, no real confusion of the two exists in any well-constructed mind, that one cannot be regarded as the mere reverse of the other like the two faces of a coin. The passive life, the permitting oneself to be tossed hither and thither by whim, impulse, desire, or passion on the theory that there can be no final distinction between good and evil, was, it is not too much to say, abhorrent

at all times to our poets. Aggressive warfare on the side of good was the one lesson which they taught in the matter of conduct. Whitman, it is true, convinced that a marked defect of the American mind is its smug priggishness in making moral decisions, ran the gauntlet of much condemnatory criticism in his endeavor to make breadth take the place of narrowness. Nevertheless, Whittier and Whitman were not nearly so far apart as popular opinion still supposes them to have been. Indeed in the matter of conduct, in the matter of choice between good and evil, Longfellow may perhaps be regarded as having given expression to the thought which all our poets held in common, when he wrote the words, "Life is real, life is earnest." Or if that quotation seems trite or trivial through our long familiarity with it, may we not say that the poets of America were striving, in their way, to preach the attainment of the very ends which Matthew Arnold believed could be reached only by the way of culture. True, the English critic was impatient with Puritanism wherever he found it, whether in England or America; yet the fact remains that religion was to our poets every whit what culture was to him — a study of perfection. If he and they had no important terms in common, they could, had they wished, have easily adopted as their motto those words of Bishop Wilson's so much delighted in by Arnold as his slogan: "To make reason and the will of God prevail."

Of evil in another sense, not in that of sin, but in that of pain and suffering on the part of the

innocent our poets were not unmindful. The question of why one is often the victim of environment or why the guiltless are so often forced to bear punishment which it would seem should in all justice be borne by the wicked alone was no less a problem to them than it has always been to thoughtful men and women. Emerson, like Browning and Tennyson, tried to wrestle with it philosophically and felt, like them, that he had made some advancement when he pointed out that in the long run good triumphs over evil. Vicarious suffering, however, whether voluntarily or involuntarily endured, is hard to bear, — is an evil indeed from more than one point of view. Even our Lord Himself, it may be remembered, asked that the cup might pass from Him. It might almost be concluded, then, that the problem was not less a mystery to Him than to us; and certainly whether it was or was not so, it has always been inscrutable to man. Certain forms of suffering, science has been able to lighten; certain kinds of pain, the mind has learned to control; but suffering and pain still remain with us — seem essential indeed to our progress towards perfection. This presence of evil in the world has made infidels of some men, sceptics and atheists of others. But our poets cast not in their lot with them. Whittier spoke for his fellow writers when, in the presence of pain and grief, he uttered to doubt the rebuking words "I only know that God is good." Convinced of that truth, they could endure all things, they could bravely say "Thy will be done," they could under-

stand that scene in Gethsemane when a greater than they, learning that his prayer would not be granted, could yet add " Nevertheless not as I will but as Thou wilt."

The last enemy, wrote Saint Paul to the Corinthians, the last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death. Whether by death the apostle meant the termination of our life in the flesh or that other death which, as the wages of sin, is allotted to many a man while he yet lives, has more than once been questioned. Be the meaning of the passage what it may, the fear of death in the usual significance of the term dogs the footsteps of men and becomes to not a few a horror indeed. Shrinking from death is innate throughout the animal kingdom and may be properly regarded as a preservative instinct implanted by nature. Man has it in common with the lower animals, yet it is not to be the less regarded on that account. If we truly believe that our existence in the flesh is in accordance with the will or even the wish of God, then are we in duty bound to hedge about that existence, lest the imprisoned splendor unduly make its escape, lest, as Browning made his Karshish aptly say,

> " pricks and cracks
> Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain
> Whereby the wily vapor fain would slip
> Back to rejoin its source before the time."

Truly, therefore, man is responding to a divine impulse when he shuns the paths of death. Too often, however, his faith is wholly shattered, or at

least is too nearly shattered when he meets that final adversary in the way, when he fights the last fight, well-knowing that it must end in defeat for him. Man is so constituted in this life that material reality gives a sense of security that no spiritual reality can impart. Strive as he may, the hour comes when hope alone is his only support, and its strength proves too often to be but the weakness of a reed.

Our poets were not different from their fellowmen. They lost not their faith, it is true; they comforted themselves with visions of reunion with those who had before them entered into the halls of death; they believed, almost without exception, that in some way, in some very true way, they should, as good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of their Lord. Yet to all, except perhaps to Whitman, the grave had for each its sting, and death had for each its victory. It was with regret that they made ready to bid farewell to earth; it was not without fear that they looked forward into the future. It would be unjust to assert of them that they received the leveling stroke with but outwardly stoical firmness, that they only played the hero with a grim determination. That would be to say that their religion had failed them at the crucial moment, that they had come to regard faith and hope and belief as all but empty, all but vain. Not one of them, not even Poe, descended to that defeat. Still, at best, cherish as they would the trust that God in his infinite wisdom doeth all things well and in his unfailing tenderness and

mercy provideth an eternal abiding-place for the children of his love, they could not any more than other men see far into the future, could not penetrate by sight the obscuring mists which lie upon the paths leading outward from our earthly dwelling-places, could not point us superb vistas opening upon bowers of everlasting loveliness, serenity, and peace. Yet beyond the gloom, they not the less trusted that these things are, trusted so perfectly, spoke of them with such certainty, that no man but finds in their words help, comfort and cheer; but finds in their manly " ave atque vale " courage, strength, and hope.

Over none of our poets could Death insultingly boast. *Resurgam* was their cry, even as they went down before him; and the emblem upon their tombs, though an inverted torch, showed a flame striving upward. However dark the gloom about the path leading onward from the grave, they set their feet therein, full confident that it led some-whither. Questioning, for, like Whittier, none of them knew certainly what the future hath of marvel or surprise, all gazed forward. One, it is true, was sure of no more than a step or two; others, however, were firm in the belief that the distant prospects to which they lifted their eyes were no deceptive mirage reflected from the past; and one, indeed, wholly undismayed, nay, eager for the outward journey, greeted the unseen with a cheer. Bold in his utterance as a prophet of ancient Israel, Whitman rebuked and still rebukes our little faith, summoning us to lay hold once more upon the things

that are eternal. Triumphant as the apostle of the Risen Lord, he too uttered the withering challenge, "O Grave, where is thy victory, O Death, where is thy sting?" Whitman, the misunderstood, Whitman, the too little respected, taught here his greatest lesson, a lesson which though present in the writings of our other poets, found its perfect utterance in his manly words. Death to him is a mere incident in life. Change though it be, yet a change worthy of comment only in that it furnished an interesting experience to the undying soul. "Has any one," he asks in *Song of Myself*,

> "Has any one supposed it lucky to be born?
> I hasten to inform him, it is just as lucky to die.
> All goes forward and outward, nothing collapses,
> And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier."

In *To Think of Time*, he exclaims against looking upon death with suspicion; and in *Scented Herbage of My Breast* he went still further, demanding, "What indeed is finally beautiful except death and love?" What greater lesson than that has any man to teach? Does not that question, if it is admitted to mean all that Whitman desired it to imply contain the very essence of nearly all, if indeed not quite all that Christianity has to impart?

Within recent years two great ocean liners plying between ports of England and America have sunk beneath the waters of the Atlantic as the result in one case of accident; in the other, of wicked design. The few survivors of each of those heart-breaking

catastrophes tell us of deeds of heroic self-sacrifice which convince us that the age of chivalry has not yet wholly passed away. Among those deeds one stands forth more beautiful in itself than any poem ever written. Amidst the fearful yet courageous crowd that covered the decks of the sinking *Titanic*, stood two white-haired persons side by side, one a man whom America had learned to hold in high respect for his integrity and honor; the other, a woman, his wife. When it became clear that hope for the safety of more than but a few must be abandoned, the man pointed to his companion the way to the life-boats already rapidly loading with their human freight. But she, turning from them, looked into his face and said: "You and I have loved each other from our youth until now. As we have lived all our lives together, so let us also die." The name of that woman the world no doubt will forget; but the influence of her brave words and loving deed remains, "a good diffused to make undying music through the world." Nor shall the words of another American citizen, lost upon the *Lusitania*, be lightly forgotten. He also was well-known and one whom men delighted to honor. He, like his friends three years before, calmly awaited a fate which in his case overtook a man in the prime of life. To whom in that crowd which surrounded him shall it not be said that he gave courage and hope, when in the very jaws of death, he smilingly exclaimed, "This is the beautiful adventure?"

It cannot be asserted that these noble utterances

from American lips are traceable to any influence which American poets had had upon the speakers. It can be safely said, however, that the writings of our greater poets and the words and deeds of our nobler citizens ever make to the same goal. Despite all our impulsive and often misdirected enthusiasm, we are essentially a practical people; and despite all our materialistic and sometimes sordid tendencies, we are fundamentally a religious nation. It is only the shallow mind that scoffs at our putting the words *In God We Trust* upon our pieces of money; the more thoughtful perceive therein a deep significance. If America be indeed the melting pot into which, as Whitman maintained, the older nations must be willing to cast their best that a new power freed of all dross, may arise to rule the world with righteousness and truth; then are we justified in the hope that the practical materialism of the future as well as its no less practical spirituality, not only will be the natural outgrowth of the integrity of noble men who, though busy in the markets, have yet held mere life in itself as far, far less than love and faith; but also will be the glorious fulfilment of visions which, though seen as in a glass darkly, have none the less been truly seen by our clear-eyed, stoutly religious, sincerely reverent American poets.

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